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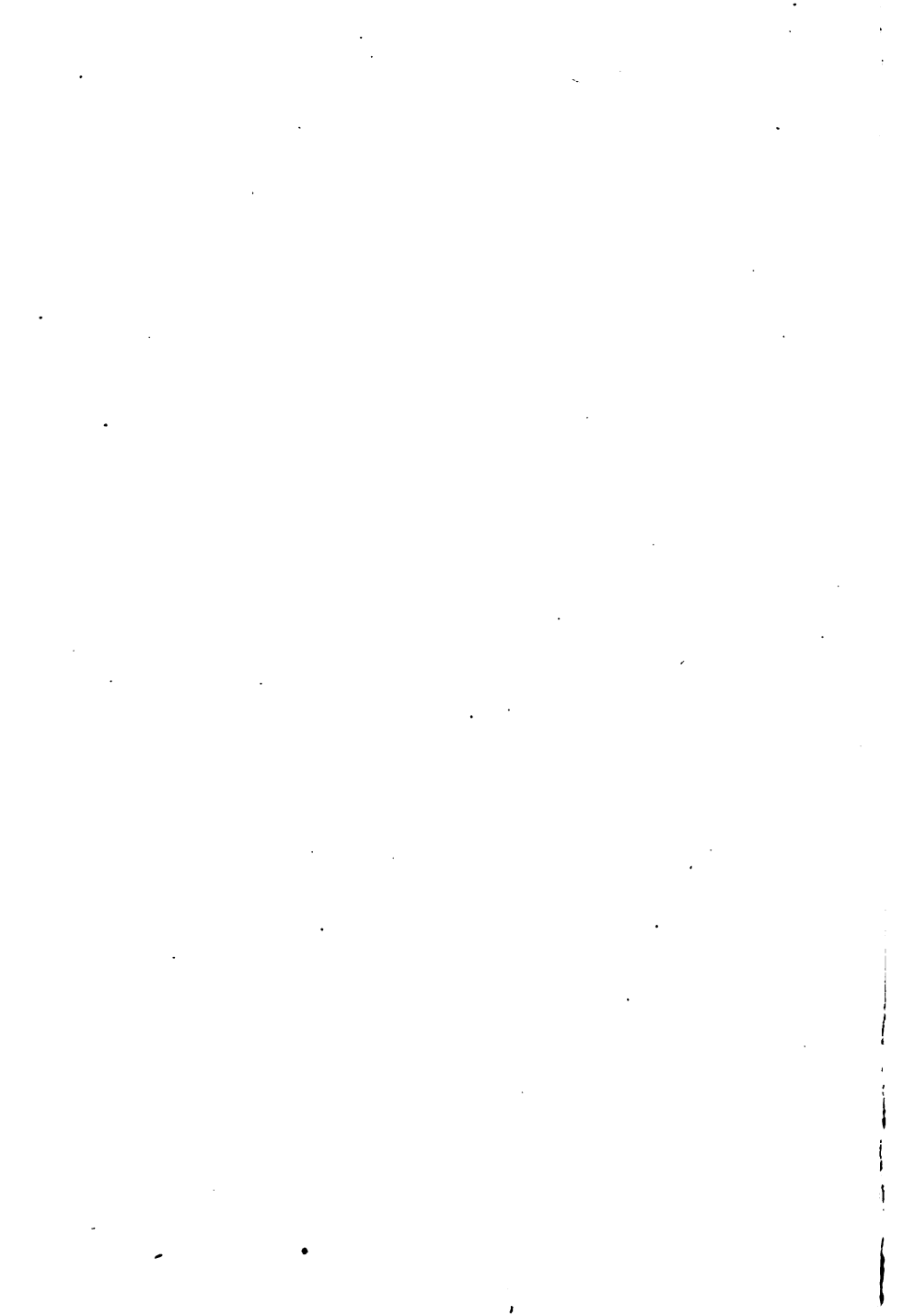
Dramana

ANNIE ARRINGTON TYSON



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DRAMANA

A Romance of the Stage



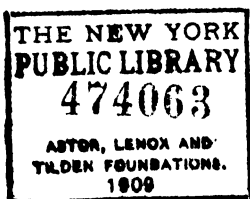
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DRAMANA

A ROMANCE OF THE STAGE

BY
ANNIE ARRINGTON TYSON

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Copyright, 1903
By ANNIE ARRINGTON TYSON

TO ALL THE BRILLIANT STARS OF THE FIRST MAGNITUDE, THAT CIRCLE AND SCINTILLATE IN THE BLUE HEAVENS OF THE THEATRICAL WORLD, THIS BOOK IS REVERENTLY INSCRIBED BY THE AUTHOR.

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INTRODUCTION.

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players
They have their exits and their entrances."

Ah, how true are the words of the Bard of Avon! All the world is a stage for the many and varied scenes of comedy and tragedy, of melodrama and farce.

Actors of to-day are striving for truism, for realism. Acting, appealing to the different emotions of man, is regarded as one of the fine arts, and is rightly classed so.

The tragedies of life are in themselves too realistic, and, to think of it, there is very little comedy in a worldly existence. Yet why should man cry out against the tragedies in life? Sorrows must come. The Great One so ordained it. The dark clouds have their silver linings and the great shadows only intensify the more the glorious golden sunshine.

Art is not silent. It hath a voice that is wondrously and marvelously beautiful. It is powerful as the roarings of a mighty sea, or soft and sweet as the music of gentle zephyrs. It speaketh to the inmost depths of the human soul, to souls that are dark and despair-

ing as the Cimmerii, or white and pure as the angel clouds.

Many pursue art, not for the pleasure and love of it, but for the livelihood that is to be gained. Some follow it for fame, while a few, nay, a very few, pursue it for the really true pleasure afforded, and because they love it for its own sake. Many who are licentious and devoid of all honor and conscience will enroll themselves as Thespians for the gold it will put into the family coffers. If there were any real worth in such creatures, they would heed the rare, wonderful voice of Art, forsake their evil paths, and follow the upright—for Art speaketh of only the good, the true, and the beautiful. It is an ignominy, a sacrilege, that such men and women should be allowed to pursue dramatic art, which speaks and means so much to mankind.

When an actor portrays a grand and noble role, one imagines *him* to be great and good like the character impersonated; but when one becomes cognizant of *his* private life, one is shocked and grieved beyond expression at his vileness. Can it be that many of the actors are of low origin? If so, why does not art refine them? Why does it not instill in them a most decided abhorrence for evil and inculcate a deep yearning for the true and the beautiful. It seems that all the vices possible are connected with the stage, and it is evident, too, that the stage is retrograding rather than attaining a high state of perfec-

tion. The majority of plays produced are generally indecent and corrupt. Why do not the dramatic critics cry out against such productions? Why do not the managers refuse to stage and send out such plays? Still further, why do not the actors firmly and boldly refuse to produce them? But, then, many of the actors are vile and corrupt, guilty of almost every vice, and, instead of scorning vicious plays, enact them without a blush and with the most callous indifference. Why is it that such actors are allowed to so degrade and disgrace that grand profession? Why not let noble actors produce noble plays? Then old and young alike would attend the theatre.

The stage is an art that speaks and appeals to all men—to men who profess no religion and discountenance the church; to men of high ideals, and to men of no ideals at all. The influence of the theatre for good upon men is more potent than that of the church, for Thespian art reaches all classes and conditions of men.

Let it be emphasized again and again that it is a shame and a sacrilege that dramatic art should be so debased, so trampled in the dirt, as if it were a vile thing and must be crushed with an iron heel.

Ever since the world was swung into space and the idea of cosmic star dust was promulgated, a war has been waging—a war between good and evil,—and it will continue

unto the end, until the stars, "the forget-me-nots of the angels," cease to bloom in the ethereal blue.

If any one wishes to prove himself a philanthropist let him espouse the cause of humanity by vigorously suppressing indecent plays.

Should the actors alone be censured for the degeneracy of Thespian art? No, a thousand times no! for many of the Thespians have been, and are still, among the noblest characters that ever lived. Upon whom, then, shall the blame rest? Shall the theatrical managers be exempt from all culpability? Shall the playwright be exculpated? Do the dramatists write the purest of literature? Is it not they who put into the mouth of the actor the noxious words of an equally noxious play? Are they not responsible for the many plays of to-day that are insipid and disgusting to the last degree? Why is not such vulgar trash destroyed before it reaches the press to pollute the hearts and wreck the souls of deluded humanity? Why is it not crushed in its very incipency and burned—yes, burned!—as Dr. Faustus was made to burn his books?

Do the dramatists not know that it is the stage that can elevate, educate and refine? It is the stage too that can degrade and corrupt to the last degree a human soul—God's soul. Every one should lift up his voice against the degradation of dramatic art. Let the ministers deplore and cry out in agony

against it. Let the authors and the press hurl most bitter invectives against such sacrilege. And, above all, let the dramatic critics assume a bold and impregnable stand and declare that the art of Thespis shall no longer have the hem of its skirts besmeared with mud.

Descend thou, O Thespis, from the mystic spheres and reclaim thy art!

"There is a charm in delivery, a magical art,
Which speaks like a kiss from the lip to the heart."

DRAMANA

A ROMANCE OF THE STAGE

CHAPTER I.

DISREGARDING A FATHER'S WISHES

Mr. Clairmont was a man of aristocratic bearing, with silver hair and beard and deep black eyes, which, despite his feebleness and infirmity, retained much of their wonted brilliancy. He was a widower with an only child, a son, and that son was the joy and pride of his heart. The old man had destined Reginald for the law, and after having secured a good practice, to marry well and settle down in life, just as he himself had done. But old Mr. Clairmont's hopes had been blighted and his plans thwarted, for Reginald had elected a profession to his own liking and in diametrical opposition to his father's wishes.

The stage had always held a peculiar fascination for the young man, and, after studying at a school for oratory, he determined to adopt it as a profession. He undoubtedly possessed a most marvelous histrionic talent.

The idea of entering the practice of law, together with that of marrying, was indeed odious to him. When the old man learned of his son's plans and intentions, he was beside himself with rage, and threatened disinheritance. He entertained the most intense aversion for the stage, deeming it a disgrace to his name for Reginald to be enrolled a member of the theatrical profession, and believing, too, that the stage and every thing connected with it was nothing more than vice, and it had ever been his wish that Reginald would live and die an upright man.

When Reginald announced his intention to his father it was the direst blow the old man had ever experienced. He endeavored to dissuade his son from his purpose, but the young man was inexorable and determined to execute his own plans. Though the old father threatened to disinherit Reginald, depriving him of a large estate and vast wealth, yet the son did not waver.

Eight years had elapsed since Reginald Clairmont became an actor, and from his initial appearance on the boards he met with signal success. Five years after his first attempt as a professional he made his debut as a star. His success as an actor was an overwhelmingly brilliant one, and ever since that memorable night he had held his own completely. His becoming an actor was the rising of a star which in its zenith would be of the first magnitude, clear and bright, and

would scintillate with such transcendent beauty in the blue heavens of the theatrical world that its brilliancy would overshadow the brightness of those stars about it.

Though very proud of his gifted son, old Mr. Clairmont never became fully reconciled to his having adopted dramatic art as a profession. He thought as he sat there alone, of all that had passed within the last few years, and the souging of the wind outside played a fitful accompaniment to his sad meditations. He leaned back in his deep easy chair and sighed heavily as he rested his silvery head against its cushions. The bronze clock on the mantel chimed the half hour.

"Ha! it is half-past five and Reginald is not in yet. He knows I dine at six," said old Mr. Clairmont impatiently, as he feebly touched the bell for the maid to light the gas.

Just as she retired some one entered the library.

"Ah, Reginald is that you? Not so prompt as usual."

"Father, I was detained by Mr. Manlyn, my manager," replied the son, seating himself near a table upon which he leaned his elbows with his cheeks in his hands.

Reginald Clairmont was a man of magnificent physique with broad chest and shoulders. Though tall and straight, he was not heavily built, but strong, full, and muscular. His hair was soft and dark as midnight; his eyes were black, keen, and brilliant, though

at times there lurked in them a pensive expression which rendered them soft and more beautiful. His complexion was also dark and his features were strong and clear-cut. Altogether he was a strikingly handsome man, and would attract attention in any assembly. Though he was inclined to be somewhat reserved and to wear an air of utter nonchalance, yet he was always debonair to everyone. He was devoted to his father, and though eight years had elapsed since he had disregarded the old man's wishes, and notwithstanding the old relations had once more been established between them, yet whenever the subject of the stage was broached Mr. Clairmont, senior, would grow restless and impatient.

"Confound your manager, the stage, and all its trappings!" exclaimed the old man somewhat angrily. "Reginald, I do wish you would abandon the stage. It has its evils, vices, and many trap-doors, and before many years have circled over your young head you will be caught and swallowed up. I am in constant dread lest you, like so many actors, be dissipated and become a debauchee."

"Father, I need not disgrace the profession by becoming dissolute," answered Reginald. "A fine actor may be a man and a gentleman. I hope I am not a man of so weak a will as to become, as you say, a debauchee. I can thankfully say that not all actors are gamblers, drunkards, and lax in

their morals. Many of them are most thorough ladies and gentlemen."

"Yes, my son, it is true that a few are ladies and gentlemen, but you know very well it is an undisputed fact that the majority of the members of the theatrical profession are careless of their own good morals. If a lady or a gentleman join a company whose members are immoral, association will soon school either to the same vices. Instead of refining and elevating the stage, women have degraded and dragged it to the lowest ebb, nay, in the very dirt. The thought is simply agonizing to contemplate. It is indeed a glad thing to know that they do not figure in politics. My son, I beg and entreat you to abandon the stage, which is the basest of all professions, and to embrace the law, which is the noblest and grandest of them all. If you would only do this, I should be so happy and so proud of you."

As the last words escaped the old man's lips he leaned forward and gazed at the young man with intense eagerness. Reginald looked straight before him with a hard tense expression on his face.

"Father, I have succeeded far beyond my hopes and anticipations, and now that I have gained such an enviable reputation and accomplished so much I am determined to remain in the profession and continue to develop my great talent. In the first place, father, I am too old to commence afresh."

"Indeed, you are not. You are quite young. If you were as old as I, you might think so. Do you prefer the reputation of a fine actor to that of a brilliant attorney? But then, it is better to be a good lawyer than to have the reputation of being one. Who would work at anything for fame merely? What is fame anyway? It is a phantasmagoria, nay, a will-o'-the-wisp that ever leads on gently, quietly. How one's eyes glisten and sparkle and how the heart pulsates with pleasure at the remote thought of dwelling in the beautiful but alluring temple of fame! Or again," continued old Mr. Clairmont in earnest tones, "how one's eyes gleam with a dreamy, far-away expression and the heart throbs with a quiet, ineffable joy at the yearning hope of wearing on one's pale brow the chaplet of fame which they fancy will become them and which they regard as far more precious and beautiful than a crown of priceless gems! How foolish, how delusive we human creatures are! Yet, Reginald, we pursue this phantom with a fervor and vehemence that is unspeakable. Why do we so ardently pursue such a phantom? For fame is shallow, shallow, shallow! Yes, my son, it is very, very, very shallow! None should tamper with or pursue such an hallucination, for more frequently it blights than fulfills one's brightest hopes. None should seek such ignis fatuus unless he be a genius or endowed with marked talent, for

it is a golden shadow that is dangerous but beautiful, alluring but disappointing.

"Most of them who are famous did not work for fame merely, but exerted their efforts for bread or for the pleasure and love of their art. To exert one's efforts merely to gain fame, and to succeed, must be an inef-fable pleasure; but otherwise it must be painfully grievous and disappointing. Reginald, I repeat, one should not chase such a golden shadow, unless he be greatly talented or a rare genius. Then, too, my son, fame will die. Nothing lives forever. History repeats itself, so does fame. If a man be great, perhaps in a few years hence another will arise greater than the first and the glory of that former one will pass into oblivion. For instance, let a dramatist gleam forth resplendently and dim his contemporaries; then after a number of years have elapsed, there, far down the horizon perchance will arise a greater luminary that shines with such overwhelming lustre that he will dim and eclipse the once sparkling brilliancy of the former man of genius. The light of the first and lesser luminary glimmers, flickers, then vanishes and all is darkness forever. I do not deny that there are many, many fixed stars among so many thousands upon thousands of writers. A few will retain and ever be regarded as fixed stars. Oh, my boy!" said the old man in a voice that shook with deep emotion, "listen to your old father. Fame is

subtle and beautiful, alluring but disappointing."

As the last words died on his lips, old Mr. Clairmont leaned back in his chair and gazed with deep, yearning tenderness upon the manly face and figure before him.

"Father, I am not courting fame," answered Reginald quietly, raising his head from his hand: "I am not an ardent devotee at her shrine. I am a devotee of art, and it is for art's sake, and because of the great love I bear it, that I work so assiduously and so indefatigably. I do not care for fame, for, as you say, it is shallow, very shallow; but great art is never. Then, too, if one have a great art it will shine forth spontaneously, the world will be compelled to recognize its worth, and fame will come unsought."

"Yes, Reginald, that is true."

"Father, let me tell you," resumed the young man in earnest tones, "the stage is a grand, noble profession, and I do not wish to disgrace but I wish, with all my soul, to elevate it. To me, music and dramatic art are the grandest of all the arts. Many will attend the theatre when they will not enter a church and—"

"Therefore," interrupted the old gentleman impatiently, "actors should be of worthy character, have high thoughts and aspirations, and endeavor to present what is good, pure, and beautiful. It is for that reason, too, that indecent plays should be suppressed,

and only those that are pure and noble in sentiment and in action should be allowed to be brought before the public. Oh, Reginald, if you would but abandon this profession, which has become so corrupt and which has been so shamefully abused, I should be as happy as I was on the day your dear mother became my wife! My boy, you are only twenty-nine, and it is not yet too late."

Reginald gazed at his father with a yearning, tender look, then said with emotion: "If I had not succeeded far beyond my dearest hopes and anticipations, I would have long ago resigned the stage and relinquished all idea of some day becoming a fine actor. But since fortune has favored me so lavishly, I shall continue to follow the stage and exert all my efforts to elevate it from its many evil tendencies."

"Ah, my son, to reform the stage and cure it of its wickedness is a herculean task indeed."

"Father, I want to prove that an actor may live an upright and virtuous life; that he so deeply loves and reveres his art that he will not degrade and drag it in the dirt, and that he will be received with open arms in the best and most cultivated homes in the world."

"Oh, my son, if only actors and managers regarded dramatic art as you do! If they did this world would be far better and happier than it is."

"Yes, father, if they only loved and revered it as I do; but the trouble is, they do not."

"No, they do not," sighed the old gentleman sadly.

There was a long silence between them, and Mr. Clairmont folded his wrinkled hands upon his knee.

"Reginald, my dear son, I see you are inflexible, and since you are so bent on following the stage as a profession, I hope and trust, with all my soul, that you will ever remain an upright man and never yield to any of the numberless temptations that environ you."

"Amen, dear father!" returned the son solemnly.

CHAPTER II

"ROMEO AND JULIET"

One afternoon, a week following the interview with his father, Reginald Clairmont and his company played at a matinee presenting "Romeo and Juliet." He had just completed his costume when a knock was heard at the door, which was immediately opened by Percival, his valet.

"Mr. Clairmont, two young women desire an audience in the green-room," announced the valet, returning.

"Who are they?" was the impatient query.

"I do not know, sir. They said they wanted to speak to you, sir."

"I will see them for a moment," was the answer.

A moment more and Reginald Clairmont saw before him two young women, one with raven hair, soft and wavy; great, melting violet eyes, fair complexion, and features of the Greek type, cold, but clear-cut, and exquisitely delicate. Indeed the *ensemble* left nothing for the artist to desire. The other had soft brown hair, a bright, beautiful face, with deep brown eyes, creamy complexion,

and very delicate, but clear-cut, features. There was a striking resemblance between them, for they were sisters. The one with the violet eyes was the taller and older of the two.

"Are you Mr. Clairmont?" queried the older one, somewhat timidly.

"Yes, what can I do for you?"

"Mr. Clairmont, we are Helene and Grace Balfour. I am Helene."

"Was Charles Balfour, my father's law partner, who died a few years ago, related to you?" he inquired, motioning them to be seated.

"Mr. Balfour was my father."

"Miss Balfour, if you have come to question me in regard to his will and financial affairs, I shall have to refer you to my father, who was appointed as one of the executors."

"We are here to know if you will appoint either of us, or both, to any positions in your company," explained Helene quietly. "If you could do so we should be so glad and so grateful. You are doubtless aware," she continued, slightly embarrassed, "that my father died leaving his financial affairs in the most straitened conditions, due to his wild speculations. Having to liquidate all debts with his life insurance, we were left very little, and that little consists of our home and a few thousand dollars, so Grace and I are aware that it is necessary for us to resort to some means of earning a livelihood."

"Miss Balfour, I am afraid you will have to appeal to some one else. How old are you?"

"Grace is sixteen and I am eighteen."

Both seemed older and more matured than girls of that age.

"Do you know how to make up?"

"No," the two responded in the same breath. It was the first time Grace had spoken.

"Have you any experience at all?"

"No," answered Grace, "we have studied elocution in its every phase and even taken part in theatricals given at school, but we have never been associated with any company."

"Do you think either of you possess any histrionic talent? If you have none, I advise you to abandon, at once, the idea of adopting the stage as a profession.

"Mr. Clairmont," said Helene quietly, allowing her liquid, violet eyes to rest on the handsome face and manly figure before her, "perhaps if you would test our powers of elocution you would be able to judge if we possessed any dramatic ability."

Just then the call-boy gave the last signal, which meant that it was time for the performance to begin.

"Miss Balfour," said Mr. Clairmont apologetically, as he arose, "I am extremely sorry that I am compelled to close our interview so abruptly, but the signal for the rising of the curtain has been given."

"I hope we have not disturbed or detained you," said Grace, somewhat confused.

"Yes, I hope we have not inconvenienced you," remarked Helene as they moved in the direction of the door.

"No, not in the least," he assured them politely. "If you choose to remain after the matinee, I shall be most happy to wait upon you."

"Thank you, Mr. Clairmont," said Helene gratefully. "Shall we inconvenience you?"

"No, not a whit," he answered. Then, motioning to the valet, said "Tell Mr. Manlyn to present these ladies with tickets and to see that they have good seats."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Clairmont," said Helene. "How much are the tickets?"

"No matter about that Miss Balfour. Percival, arrange with Mr. Manlyn and say to him that it is my wish. Be sure to tell him to assign them good seats."

"Yes, sir," replied the valet bowing.

"But, Mr. Clairmont," said Helene, somewhat embarrassed, "we would so much rather—"

"No, Miss Balfour, I would so much rather you did not. It is my wish to compliment you with tickets. Adieu, then, until after the performance," said Mr. Clairmont with a slight smile as he bowed politely and withdrew.

For a moment Grace and Helene hesitated in some confusion. Percival then signaled

them to follow him, which they did in silence. They had advanced a short distance along a corridor, en route to the box office, when they encountered a rather heavily-built man with steel-blue eyes, florid complexion, and blonde hair flecked with silver, whom Percival accosted and to whom he unfolded Mr. Clairmont's wishes. In a few minutes more the Misses Balfour were escorted to the best available seats, for there were very few vacancies and even at that hour people continued to enter. Mr. Manlyn expressed his regret at being unable to secure better ones for them. They thanked him and assured him that they enjoyed an excellent view of the stage.

They had scarcely glanced at their programme, when the lights were extinguished, the orchestra began to play, and the curtain ascended. It was a scene of beauty that met the gaze of Grace and Helene Balfour. Before the days of their reverses they had witnessed many plays of note, which had been presented by leading actors in a most marvelous and masterly manner. The scene before them this afternoon far eclipsed anything that they had ever beheld.

The play opened, of course, with the entertainment in progress at the home of Juliet. They had been dancing the stately minuet for some time when Romeo and his friend who were masked, entered. Helene and Grace noted the exquisite scenery and the

elegant costumes. What strange feelings enveloped Helene as she viewed the beautiful spectacle before her.

The entrance of the two masked strangers did not, however, disturb the dancers. One of the strangers was introduced to Juliet, with whom he danced later in the evening.

What manly grace, what magnificent presence, and what a grand voice was Reginald Clairmont's. Helene and Grace recognized Mr. Clairmont's leading lady from the photograph they had seen in the green-room. Florence Grand was indeed a beautiful woman. She was tall and plump, with soft golden hair and liquid gray eyes.

In the scene where fair Juliet rested her cheek upon her hand and called out to Romeo, who she believed was far away,—for it was almost morning,—but who was really standing in the garden beneath her window, Florence Grand was very sweet, while Reginald Clairmont was a veritable Romeo. In the balcony scene and when bidding Juliet good-bye, his impersonation of Romeo was something marvelous. His acting was so easy, so graceful, so polished and so without affectation that one scarcely felt it to be acting. It seemed realism itself. Reginald Clairmont possessed individuality. He did not, as a great many actors do, strive after the melodramatic. His desire was to reach true art, art at its zenith, and not lower his own high standard to suit and please the

fickle public. He believed that in order to become a truly great artist one must be so absorbed in his work, and love it so intensely, that he is absolutely oblivious of his audience, of himself even. He believed that a truly great artist so deeply loves and reverences his art that he never degrades it by working merely for fame and money, but remains true to it. In remaining true to his art he was ever true to himself, and, above all, true to his God. He argued that art was divine, a gift from God, and that if he put into it his whole soul he would not have to strive for fame or effect, but the effect would surely be there and fame would inevitably follow. Such a man and such an artist was Reginald Clairmont, so true, so grand, so noble. His voice was a deep barytone and very musical, and his articulation and accent, together with his gesticulations, were perfect.

As Helene sat there and witnessed all before her she was utterly deprived of words to express her feelings. Never before had she seen such acting. She felt a deep respect for Mr. Clairmont because of his not trifling with art and because, too, of his intense love and reverence for it. She yearned to be half the artist that he was, and so adorn Art's temple. Grace, too, was more than charmed with Mr. Clairmont's acting. For the first time in all her life she was impressed with the divinity of art. Her conception, how-

ever, of what art was and what art meant, was not so deep as Helene's.

The closing scene was indeed tragic and heart-rending. Florence Grand was very good, but she raved and her voice was a trifle too stressful. Still, on the whole, she acted very well, and was a few degrees above the average. Helene wondered why Mr. Clairmont did not engage some woman who was as much a devotee of art as himself to play opposite him. She thought that if he could employ a person who was his equal as an artist the combination would be unsurpassable. As it was, the acting of his leading woman was as far eclipsed by his own as the moon's silvery rays are dimmed by the brilliant, golden glory of the noon-day sun. Ah, Reginald Clairmont was not only greatly talented, but he was a rare genius; nay, more than that, he was truly an Emersonian genius. To those who loved and revered ideals, he was all that could be desired, and to those who preferred realism, he was the very embodiment of their wishes. Try as they would, no one else could act as he did, nor could they imitate. "Art is imitative and music creative;" but who could say, when Reginald Clairmont was acting, that dramatic art was not both imitative and creative?

When the curtain had descended at the end of the last act, Helene drew a long breath, then turning to Grace, she asked, "How did you enjoy the play?"

"O, Helene," responded Grace with enthusiasm, "I have never seen such magnificent acting before. Mr. Clairmont is simply grand. He is just inimitable, and his acting is all and completely his own. Though Florence Grand is good, she does not in any way equal him. If he had a leading woman who was his equal as an artist and who comprehended the meaning and motive of art as well as he, the combination would be marvelous, complete, unexcelled. Oh, if I could be half the artist that Mr. Clairmont is, I should be so happy, so very happy!"

"Ah, Grace," sighed Helene, "that is what I have been wishing."

"That you could be half the artist he is?"

"Yes Grace," answered Helene in a low, sad voice as they neared the green-room.

CHAPTER III

A CRUCIAL TEST

How the heart pulsates with fear at the thought of a trial that will determine one's failure or success in life! So it was that Helene and Grace regarded the test of their powers of elocution. The stage had always held for these two a most peculiar fascination. They determined that, if success were theirs, they would exert every effort and strain every energy in behalf of the good of their company and profession. They advocated that if a woman were true to herself and true to those with whom she associated, great good would inevitably follow.

Why cannot a man or a woman retain a good name and always remain connected with the stage? Why cannot a man or a woman remain the same noble character after entering the theatrical world? There is certainly no reason why they should not do so. True dramatic art does not demand every sacrifice. It demands great talent or more—genius, that which is pure and lofty, and, above all, that its pursuers be true to themselves. The two resolved that, at all hazards, they would preserve their good name.

When Helene and Grace arrived at the green-room, they slightly hesitated, feeling that a moment's pause would reinstate their courage. It would have been distressing if their bravery had been entirely shaken and if their womanly determination had been shattered at so critical a point; but not so with two such noble women. They rapped gently on the door, which was quietly opened by Mr. Clairmont, who, on ushering them in, introduced to them Mr. Manlyn, his manager; a Mr. Lance and a Mr. Leonard, who were respectively, violinist and harpist, members of the orchestra that played at the Clairmont Theatre, and last of all, Mr. Harold Armour, his leading man and one of his most trusted friends.

When all were seated he said: "Mr. Manlyn, these are the young ladies about whom I was speaking to you a moment ago. Suppose we ask them to recite now, as our time is somewhat limited. Miss Balfour," he said, turning and addressing Helene, "we shall be glad to have your recitation."

"Grace, will you recite first?" requested the elder of the two sisters.

"Yes, if you wish it."

She rose and recited, most effectively and charmingly, Dr. Holmes' beautiful little poem "The Last Leaf." In the poem there is a strain of sadness, together with an exquisite sense of humor, the blending of which renders it a perfect gem. There was about

Grace, as she recited the lines, a sweet, girlish brightness that made her irresistible.

"Miss Balfour, will you now favor us with something?" was Mr. Clairmont's slightly indifferent but courteous request.

For reply, Helene rose and quietly divested herself of hat and gloves, which she regarded as an incumbrance. There was a moment's hesitation. Her cheeks became flushed, her lips parted and then she recited that exquisitely beautiful poem of Mrs. Browning's, "A Woman's Question." Her movements were easy, graceful, and natural. Her voice, ah, what a voice was hers! so clear, so deep, so rich, and so exquisitely beautiful. Hers was of that rare contralto that appeals, that is so expressive, and that penetrates to the very depths of one's soul. As she recited, with intense depth of feeling, the wonderfully beautiful and impressive lines, all were aware that she was utterly oblivious of their presence and even unconscious of self; that, too, she allowed nothing to distract her, but was absorbed, heart and soul, in the poem. Her tone, accent, and articulation were absolutely perfect.

As Mr. Armour, Mr. Clairmont, and, indeed, all the others gazed upon that face with its pure white brow, its mobile lips and, above all, its large, unfathomable, violet eyes, in which were reflected the inmost depths of her soul, they thought they had never laid eyes upon such marvelous beauty. Though Hel-

ene was only eighteen, she yet appeared older, and, indeed, seemed a thorough woman. When first Mr. Clairmont saw Florence Grand he thought she was the most striking woman he had ever beheld, but since she had been his leading woman for two seasons her beauty had become distasteful to him. He, in fact, cared very little or nothing for women; indeed, he was denominated Pygmalion by his friends because of his abhorrence for the sex and because, too, the thought of marriage was so intensely odious to him. He did not, however, soften his heart toward the fair sex as he gazed upon the cold, proud, and queenly woman before him, but instead hardened it. He thought that she was not unlike all other women, flip-pant and superficial. He had never seen his ideal. He did, indeed, possess one, as no man is without an ideal. He even ventured so far as to flatter himself that he could marry any one whom he wished. For the last three years he had entirely dismissed the idea from his mind. Still, with all his aversion for womankind, Reginald Clairmont permitted his eyes to rest with feigned indifference upon Helene Balfour as she gave to them, with all the intense feeling and power of her soul:

"A WOMAN'S QUESTION.

"Do you know you have asked for the costliest thing
Ever made by the hand above—
A woman's heart, a woman's life,
And a woman's wonderful love?

"Do you know you have asked for this priceless thing

As a child might ask for a toy—
Demanding what others have died to win
With the reckless dash of a boy?

"You have written my lesson of duty out;
Man-like you have questioned me;
Now stand at the bar of my woman's soul
Until I have questioned thee.

"You require your mutton shall always be hot;
Your socks and your shirts shall be whole;
I require that your heart shall be true as God's stars
And pure as heaven your soul.

"You require a cook for your mutton and beef;
I require a far better thing:
A seamstress you're wanting for stockings and shirts—
I look for a man and a king.

"A king for the beautiful realm called Home,
And a man that the Maker, God,
Shall look upon as he did the first,
And say, 'It is very good.'

"I am fair and young, but the rose will fade
From my soft young cheek some day.
Will you love me then 'mid the falling leaves,
As you did mid the bloom of May?

"Is your heart an ocean, so strong and deep
I may launch my all on its tide?
A loving woman finds a heaven or hell
On the day she is made a bride.

"I require all things that are grand and true,
All things that a man should be:
If you give this all, I would stake my life
To be all you demand of me.

"If you cannot do this, a laundress and cook
You can hire, with little to pay:
But a woman's heart and a young woman's life
Are not to be won that way."

When the lines were concluded there was perfect silence for a moment, broken by Mr. Clairmont.

"Miss Balfour," he said, "I will make this proposition: Are you willing to accept thirty dollars per week and have your costumes furnished? Of course you are perfectly aware that your role must be an extremely minor one. You cannot expect to impersonate the more difficult parts when you have had no experience whatever. If your sister be willing, I will offer her twenty dollars per week and her costumes."

Helene's eyes drooped and a delicate flush suffused her cheeks. "Mr. Clairmont," she said, "are the roles in which you will employ us suitable for a lady to impersonate? If they are, we shall be glad to accept your offer; if not, we shall not avail ourselves of it."

"Yes, Miss Balfour, I can assure you that they are. If, after you have been with me for some time, I discover that you possess more than ordinary talent and are capable of filling more difficult roles, I shall certainly aid you in arriving at that standard of art for which you are striving. The offer I have just made is the very best I can do for you. Is it agreeable to you?"

"Yes, I think it is."

"Then I will draw up the contract now."

"Very well," she answered.

"You know. Miss Balfour," he continued,

"that it is to be a season contract, beginning from to-morrow, which is the fifth of October, and lasting to the first week in May."

"Suppose you write it out," said Helene quietly, "and then submit it to me."

"Miss Balfour," he replied with an ironical smile, "I certainly do not wish to take advantage of a woman. I hope I am a gentleman," he added with cool but polite indifference as he reached over for pen, ink, and paper.

The color swept in deep waves over Helene's face and a painful embarrassment was felt by both sisters.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Clairmont. I did not intend anything," was the somewhat timid explanation.

"An apology is quite unnecessary, Miss Balfour," was the cool assurance. "It was my intention to submit the paper for personal approval before requiring your signature."

Having written it, he extended the paper to her. Helene perused it and then said firmly, "Since we accept your offer, I beg you will always remember that we are to fill only those roles befitting a lady."

"I shall not forget, I assure you. Now, will you please sign?"

"Will you first insert in the contract a clause to that effect?"

"Miss Balfour, a moment ago I said I hoped I was a gentleman and that I would not deal unfairly with a woman. If you will abide by this contract as befits a lady, I shall

most assuredly do so as becomes a gentleman. Kindly dictate the clause you wish inserted and I will write it."

When she had complied with his request and she and Grace had signed the paper, both parties reserving copies of same, Helene said:

"I regret, Mr. Clairmont, that I seemed so exacting. Grace and I thank you deeply for your kindness and we trust that, some day, we may have the opportunity of proving to you our gratitude."

"Yes," added Grace, "we are indeed grateful."

"I am truly glad that I was permitted the pleasure of serving you," returned Mr. Clairmont with courtly dignity.

As they all rose, Mr. Clairmont approached Mr. Armour and laid his hand on his shoulder. "Armour, old fellow, you are not going now? You have ample time, before going to dine with Chelcy, to chat with me."

"Clairmont," responded the young man, with a pleasant smile, "I am sorry, but I really can't linger. I wish I could. Aren't you to be one of us at Chelcy's this evening?"

"No; I declined his invitation because I promised father I would dine with him. I regret so much I shall not be able to dine with you, Chelcy—and Kroker—you three whom I esteem to be my dearest friends."

"Clairmont, old friend," said Mr. Armour, extending his hand, "you do not know how we miss you when you are not one of us."

Mr. Clairmont grasped his friend's proffered hand and pressed it warmly, saying: "I always esteem it a great misfortune when I am denied the pleasure of the company of you three at dinner. I promised father to dine with him, and as he is getting old and somewhat childish I feel that I ought not to disappoint him."

"I know how you feel about it."

"Chelcy understands how it is. I wish, though, Armour, you would tell him how very much I regret not being able to accept his invitation."

"I will," said Mr. Armour, with an expression of sorrow in his noble brown eyes. "Never mind, old friend," he added, "we three will dine again together very soon."

While the two were engaged in conversation, Helene and Grace had donned their hats, gloves, and wraps.

"Miss Balfour, I shall expect you and your sister to be present at the rehearsal to-morrow at ten o'clock. Indeed, you must attend them all."

"We shall be prompt, I assure you."

"Indeed we shall, Mr. Clairmont," added Grace.

When they were in the act of passing through the door, Mr. Armour advanced and said in a most gentlemanly manner: "Miss Balfour, will you and your sister allow me the pleasure of accompanying you home?"

"We thank you very much, Mr. Armour,

but we would rather not trouble you," replied Grace, blushing prettily.

"It is no trouble whatever. I assure you it is a pleasure. May it be mine?"

"Mr. Armour," said Helene, "we would rather not inconvenience you. We can easily board the car and be at home in a few minutes. Besides," she added, "if we were to avail ourselves of your kind offer we should make you late at Mr. Chelcy's."

"I know where you live and my quarters are only a few doors beyond."

"Some other time we shall be glad to accept your kind escort," was Helene's assurance.

"I trust you will," he returned, as he bowed and withdrew.

When they had said good evening to the rest of the company and were about to pass out, Helene unconsciously raised her eyes for a moment and they encountered those of Mr. Clairmont resting upon her. A wave of deep color swept over her face. Then, inclining her head for a second time, she and Grace withdrew.

When the door had closed behind them, Mr. Manlyn said, "Clairmont, I really think both of them have remarkable talent and I prophesy for them a brilliant future, especially for Miss Balfour. I think she possesses greater dramatic ability than her sister. Her contralto voice is one of the fullest and richest I have heard in many years. It could be

exceptionally adapted to the stage. Miss Grace is beautiful and possesses an unusual charm of manner. Certain roles will render her exceedingly popular."

"I am of your opinion, Manlyn," returned Mr. Clairmont. "There is in Miss Balfour that quality known as the intensely dramatic. I determined, from the manner in which she recited, that she reveres the dramatic art; that she believes it to be a divine gift, and that, too, when she has had some experience as an actress, she will not work for fame or money merely, but will labor to lift it out of its evil tendencies and elevate it to its high standard."

"Yes, I quite agree with you," said the manager. "When she was reciting Mrs. Browning's poem she seemed to enter into it with her whole soul."

"She did indeed."

"I think," said Mr. Lance, who was a rather silent man, with dark hair reaching to his shoulders, dark eyes, pensive in expression, and a face that twitched nervously and denoted that he was strongly given to dissipation,—"I think," he said, speaking for the first time "that Miss Balfour is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"She certainly is the most beautiful one I ever saw," asserted Mr. Leonard.

"Yes, she is very beautiful," agreed Mr. Clairmont, with a perfect coolness.

In a few moments more all had left the theatre.

CHAPTER IV

"ALL IS NOT GOLD THAT GLITTERS"

"O, Helene," said Grace the next morning, "I wonder if the adage will prove true in our case."

"What adage?" queried Helene, when she had put away in her *escritoire* the paper Mr. Clairmont had given her the day before.

"'A good beginning makes a bad ending.'"

"I hope not. Just to think, Grace, we shall earn fifty dollars a week, or two hundred dollars a month. That will help us some and we shall not be compelled to go to Uncle George."

"Yes, I am very glad that we can make something," said Grace. Then she continued, in somewhat anxious tones, "I wonder what Uncle George, Aunt Julia, and especially mother, will say when they learn what we have done?"

"I am sure I do not know," was the somewhat meditative answer.

"But, Helene," persisted Grace, "you know they all were so bitterly opposed to our idea of entering upon a stage career. I hope they will not be angry, don't you?"

"Yes, I do hope so."

Grace was most voluble on this morning, and she continued: "Hence, if Uncle George and Aunt Julia are wealthy, we do not want them to support us."

"Of course not," Helene replied firmly, as she arranged her hair.

Mr. and Mrs. Kroker were people of affluence, culture, and refinement. They had an only child, Gerald, who was a man about twenty-nine years old. He was a person of most pleasing address and appearance, with dark eyes, hair, and mustache. He was devoted to his cousins, and Helene and Grace were, in turn, tenderly attached to him. Old Mr. Kroker was their mother's brother, and though he and his wife did and would continue to do everything and anything in their power for the happiness and welfare of their nieces, yet Helene and Grace Balfour were most independent young women and they were determined to seek their own livelihood. As they felt a most deep and sacred reverence for dramatic art, they resolved to adopt the stage as a profession.

"Yes, Grace," remarked Helene, "you are quite right. We will not look to Uncle George and Aunt Julia for everything. We will," she asserted with strong emphasis, "work hard, grow independent, at least accumulate something, and then, after we have accomplished so much, we will above all, strive after all that is true, grand, and beautiful in dramatic art."

"That we will!" assented Grace in most vehement tones. There was a short silence on the part of these two strong-minded young women, then Grace said, "By the way, Helene, did you notice how that horrid Mr. Lance eyed you yesterday when we were making our adieus to Mr. Clairmont?"

"Which one of them was Mr. Lance?"

"He was that dreadful-looking man with the dark hair reaching to his shoulders, who looked if he were given to dissipation."

"O, yes. I recall him now. I was not aware that he scrutinized me so."

"Well, if you did not see him, I did," affirmed Grace, with rising indignation. "If I had been a man then, I would have hurled him to the earth."

"Well, Grace," laughed her sister, "I am very glad that you were not a man then. It was exceedingly rude and unbecoming in Mr. Lance to eye me so, yet I am glad I did not know of it and that all passed as it did."

"Helene, I do so hate to have people stare at either of us."

"So do I, dear," replied the elder sister as she circled her arm about the younger one and they descended the stairs to breakfast.

"My dears, where did you go yesterday afternoon?" inquired Mrs. Balfour of her daughters, as she entered the library where the rest of the household had assembled after the morning repast.

Mrs. Balfour was a slender woman of forty-two years, with sympathetic brown eyes and soft, wavy brown hair brushed away from her forehead. She was a person of very strong feelings. Her daughters were her all, her every absorbing thought.

"We were at a matinee," explained Helene, "and saw Mr. Clairmont in 'Romeo and Juliet.' We enjoyed the play beyond measure. His acting is something marvelous."

"Yes, mother," echoed Grace, "his acting is simply magnificent. He is my very ideal of an actor."

"My dears, I am so glad you enjoyed it. I have seen Mr. Clairmont, and I regard him as one of the greatest of American actors, if not the greatest of them all. He is just inimitable."

"Why, Grace," said Gerald, "I was at the matinee, but did not see you. Where did you sit?"

She told him.

"Well," continued the young man, "I was with Chelcy and Armour. When the play was over, Chelcy and I waited at the door of the theatre for Armour, who had gone back to the stage to speak to Clairmont, and we saw everybody who came out. When Armour finally joined us he did not once refer to his interview or what occurred in Clairmont's dressing-room."

Grace evaded any explanation of how she and Helene happened to witness the play.

So she simply said, "Helene and I knew, after we came home, that you had been there and yet we had not seen you."

"Of course you know now, since I have told you."

"No," said Grace, with a smile, "I mean we knew it before we came home."

"How did you know? Some one must have told you."

"No, not exactly."

"Then how did you know?"

"I am not going to tell."

"Please do."

"Well, I will then, on one condition."

"What is that?"

"Will you promise me something?"

"That depends; what is it?"

"Will you promise?" she persisted.

For a moment he hesitated, then said, "Well—yes."

"Tell me how long you, Mr. Chelcy, Mr. Armour, and Mr. Clairmont have been such good friends."

"How do you know we are such good friends?" queried Gerald, somewhat mystified.

"First answer my question," said Grace, "and then I will reply to yours."

"Well," replied Gerald, "we were all off at college together and there became staunch friends and have remained so ever since."

"You never spoke of them."

"Is it necessary for me to mention every friend I have?"

"No, of course not," she answered. "The only ones of whom I have ever heard you speak are Mr. Chelcy and a Mr. Grey."

"Ah, yes, Egerton Grey. He was one of us, and we five formed quite a nice clique."

"Tell me," persisted Grace, "is Mr. Armour a nice man?"

"Yes, certainly he is. His is one of the noblest families in this country and, too, he is enormously wealthy."

"Then why is he an actor?"

"Grace, every one does not adopt the stage as a profession from a pecuniary standpoint. Some enter the theatrical world because they love dramatic art. Armour loves and reveres it. The same is true of Reginald Clairmont. He, too, is a member of one of the oldest and best families in this country and is heir to an untold fortune; yet he is so absorbed in his profession that he has had no thought for anything else. His father is desirous of his entering the practice of law and, too, is very anxious to see him married and settled in life before his death. Clairmont is of a most misogamistic nature and entertains a perfect abhorrence for women. It is rumored, however, that Florence Grand, Clairmont's leading woman, is very much in love with him and that she is the only woman he can tolerate."

"Perhaps," suggested Helene, with a slightly scornful smile parting her proud, sensitive lips, "his extreme aversion for the fair sex is due to a disappointment in love."

"Why, Helene!" laughed Gerald. "I never knew Reginald Clairmont to be in love in my life. He is utterly indifferent to women, says they are fickle and superficial, and that they are thoroughly uninteresting to him. His profession is the thing that absorbs his whole soul. Now tell me, Grace," he added, "how you knew I was at the matinee yesterday afternoon?"

"Must I tell, Helene?"

"I have no objection."

"Well—er—then," began Grace, "Helene and I went to ascertain if Mr. Clairmont would assign us positions in his company and—"

"What is that about a position in Mr. Clairmont's company?" questioned Mrs. Balfour in profound astonishment.

Grace turned and, flushing deeply, said with fear, "Mother, Helene will tell you all about it."

"Explain it to me at once," Mrs. Balfour demanded.

"Wait a moment, mother, and then I will unfold everything," with which Helene disappeared, but soon returned and seated herself on the divan beside her mother.

"Mother, dear, Grace and I repaired to the Clairmont Theatre to ask Mr. Clairmont if he

would assign to us positions in his company. The success with which we met exceeded our anticipations. Grace is to have twenty dollars a week and her costumes furnished and I am to receive thirty dollars a week and my costumes. We, together, shall earn fifty dollars per week or two hundred dollars a month. Of course our parts will be extremely minor ones."

For several minutes Mrs. Balfour sat in mute astonishment. Then, after she had recovered her usually quiet feelings, she said reproachfully: "Helene, you and Grace are aware, and indeed you have always known, that your uncle and myself have entertained the bitterest opposition to your adopting the stage as a profession, and now you have acted directly contrary to our wishes. How could you disregard them? You know we are ever looking to your interest. This very morning I shall call upon Mr. Clairmont and inform him that you decline his offer. I shall tell him that what you have done does not meet with my approval and that he must engage some one else."

"But, mother," pleaded Helene, "we have signed a contract with him and here it is."

She drew forth the paper and extended it to her mother. Mrs. Balfour took it, and after reading it, said to her brother, "George, don't you think if Mr. Clairmont were a gentleman, and I were to request it, he would

release Helene and Grace from this contract?"

"I think he would, Lydia," replied Mr. Kroker, "if he be a gentleman."

"Aunt Lydia," said Gerald, coloring deeply, "Reginald Clairmont is a thorough gentleman. Indeed, I have never known a more noble man than he."

"I beg your pardon," returned Mrs. Balfour, apologetically. "I do not question his nobleness. But, Gerald, do you think he would release them if I were to request it?"

"Yes, I am quite sure he would," replied the young man simply.

"Helene, you and Grace have always known that your father disapproved most strenuously of women adopting the stage as a profession. What would he say to this if he were living?" inquired Mrs. Balfour sadly.

"Mother," answered Helene, "you know full well that we are poor and that Grace and I must exert ourselves in some way to earn a comfortable support, and our only talent, it seems, lies in the direction of dramatic art."

"Come here to me, Helene," said Mrs. Kroker, "and let me have a talk with you."

The niece and aunt seated themselves on a sofa. Then the dear old lady said, "Helene, my dear, do you really intend to enter the theatrical world?"

"Yes, Aunt Julia, I do," Helene answered, with proud determination. "I am," she continued, "simply an understudy, and the roles

I chance to impersonate will, of course, be minor ones. So it is with Grace. Of course we shall have to work unremittingly and attend all of the rehearsals, but then we shall not mind it so very much."

"Ah, my dear child," tenderly remonstrated Mrs. Kroker, "do you perfectly comprehend the full meaning of the life lived behind the footlights? It means hard work, hard study, and many, many hardships to undergo. It means not only all this, my dear child," added the lovely old lady, "but it means, too, association with many vulgar and unprincipled people. Not all stage people are of this character, for some, indeed many of them, are persons of the purest and noblest minds and hearts, but still, dear heart, one must encounter and submit to a great deal when one goes behind the footlights. Helene, how true is that proverb from Cervantes, 'All is not gold that glisters!' There is a bright halo, a roseate glow, as it were, which, like a veil of exquisite film and delicacy, seems to envelop the stage and its people. When that veil is lifted, there are no longer the sweet dreams of the imagination, for they have been dispelled; but there is, in their place, stern, unadulterated reality. The stage, with all its scenery, its costumes, and its footlights, attracts and fascinates youth, and especially young girls. Dear child, I advise you and Grace to abandon this idea at once. Even the career of a star is not so

smooth as one might think. They, too, undergo much that is most unpleasant. Let me entreat and implore you, Helene, to relinquish all ideas of becoming an actress," pleaded Mrs. Kroker. "Promise me that you will. You, Grace, and your mother can still make your home with us and we will do everything in our power to make you happy."

"Haven't we always tried to make it pleasant and comfortable for you, Helene, since the first day you came to live with us, over two years ago?" inquired Mr. Kroker, drawing his chair nearer to them.

"Yes, Uncle George, you have," returned his niece earnestly, with tears in her eyes. "You and Aunt Julia have been so good, so very kind to us, and we owe you much which we can never repay."

"Tut, child," said the old man kindly; "we want you to live with us always. Don't we, Julia?"

"Yes, indeed we do," assented Mrs. Kroker, tenderly circling her arm about her niece.

"Then, Uncle George," affirmed Helene, "we will continue to make your house our home if you will let us be a little independent, so that we need not come to you for everything."

"Helene," said old Mr. Kroker tenderly, "you and Grace are my sister's children but Julia and I feel as if you were our own. It hurts us that you should wish to be inde-

pendent and not want to come to us. We are bitterly opposed to your going upon the stage. You do not know, you cannot know, dear child, what stage life means."

"That is exactly what I have been telling her, George," said his wife.

"I dare say, Uncle George," said Helene, "you and Aunt Julia think me obstinate, but as I have formulated plans and as I feel that my only talent lies in the direction of dramatic art, I shall not allow any one or anything to dissuade me or to frustrate those plans."

As she said this there lurked in her deep, shadowy, violet eyes an unwavering determination to follow her own volition, and the dear old people knew that any inducement they might offer would avail nothing.

"Well, my child," observed Mr. Kroker, with a sad smile, "the stage and its people have a romantic glamour about them for you now, but when you have tasted sufficiently of it all, the glamour will have been displaced by cold, unadorned reality and you will then cease to care any more about it."

"Uncle George, I really think I shall learn to love it very much."

"You think so now, perhaps, but you will not be of this same opinion long. Ah, dear one," sighed the old man, "you do not know how many young hearts that have worked and struggled hard, believing that they possessed histrionic ability, have finally discov-

ered that they have been laboring under a most roseate and subtle delusion and have withered, been crushed and oftentimes broken."

"That is true, George," said Mrs. Balfour. "I would give anything if they would only heed our advice."

"I would, too," was her brother's answer.

There were several moments of silence. Then Helene, glancing up at the clock, said: "Grace, it is quite time we were betaking ourselves to the rehearsal. You know that Mr. Clairmont was expressly desirous that we should be prompt."

"First, Grace, you must tell how you knew I was at the matinee yesterday afternoon," announced Gerald, gently detaining her.

"Well," said Grace, with a smile, "at the conclusion of the play Helene and I recited for Mr. Clairmont, and when we had finished he expressed his regrets to Mr. Armour because of his inability to accept Mr. Chelcy's invitation to dinner, where you and Mr. Armour also had been invited."

"Yes, Chelcy asked all three of us to dine with him after the play. Clairmont could not go because he had promised to dine at home with his father, who is getting old and somewhat childish. So, then, by what you heard you suspected me of having witnessed the performance?" laughed Gerald.

"Yes," she answered.

"That was very poor proof, Grace," said the young man. "If I had been suspected of murder and I was innocent, I should protest against your being one of the jurors."

"Would you?"

"Yes, indeed I should. But, Grace," he added laughing, "you did guess correctly about my being at the matinee after all."

CHAPTER V

"THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII"

Two years have elapsed since Grace and Helene Balfour connected themselves with Mr. Clairmont's company. Old Chronos had indeed wrought many changes, and Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, too, with thread, needle, and shears had woven a great deal more of the destinies of those two brave young women. In those last two years they had labored unremittingly, and with all of their assiduous work and study success soon was theirs, for they had developed a most marvelous talent for their chosen art.

The great actor and his manager, too, had labored indefatigably. Mr. Clairmont had been for the last few years engaged in dramatizing a book, the production of which he felt sure would constitute one of the greatest successes and possibly create the sensation of the season. He knew, too, that there were in the book dramatic situations worthy of the most careful study and attention from the most renowned actors. The work that had been dramatized was "The Last Days of Pompeii." Mr. Clairmont was aware that if it were properly dramatized it would offer full scope for magnificent acting.

At the conclusion of the final rehearsal he and Mr. Manlyn were satisfied, for they felt that success would surely be theirs. The public always awaited with the keenest impatience the opening night of Mr. Clairmont's productions, and it knew that whatsoever he placed upon the boards he and his play would score an ovation. The New York audience had the utmost confidence in him and in his judgment, and it knew that he and his new drama could not meet with less than a triumph.

The opening night of the "Last Days of Pompeii" arrived. It was, too, the evening of the debut of a star, Miss Helene Balfour, who had been installed leading woman of the Clairmont Company, the position once occupied by Florence Grand. Both Mr. Clairmont and Mr. Manlyn saw that Miss Grand did not comprehend and appreciate art to its fullest meaning, so they entrusted to her the character of "Julia," a minor part. At first she was highly indignant and refused to act, but after several days of calm meditation, she reconsidered and decided that she would not sever her connection with the Clairmont Company, but would remain in the cast, for reasons that were sacred to her and entirely her own.

That evening the Clairmont Theatre was packed to its fullest capacity. Even standing-room was at a premium, while hundreds of people were turned away. "The Last

Days of Pompeii" was, indeed, a strong play. It was replete with interest and intensely thrilling to the very end. All of the most salient points, and, in fact, the entire play, revolved upon the two central figures, Arbaces and Nydia, together with the grand finale, in the next to the last act, which was the eruption of Vesuvius. The characters of Arbaces and Nydia were respectively assumed by Mr. Reginald Clairmont and Miss Helene Balfour. At first Helene was a trifle nervous, but as the play progressed she thoroughly regained her self-possession.

The first act opened with a view of one of the principal thoroughfares of the city. The street, on both sides, was lined with richly-appointed shops and throngs of people, consisting of nobles, peasants, and slaves, who passed and repassed. Here and there were groups of nobles engaged in conversation; discussing, perchance, the baths, the laws, or the last exciting encounter in the arena between the lion and the gladiator, and when there would be another. It was, indeed, a gorgeous scene, in the midst of which the rich voice of a young girl was heard singing

THE BLIND FLOWER GIRL'S SONG.

"Buy my flowers—O buy, I pray!
The blind girl comes from afar;
If the earth be as fair as I hear them say,
These flowers her children are!
Do they her beauty keep?
They are fresh from her lap, I know;

For I caught them fast asleep
In her arms an hour ago.
With the air which is her breath—
Her soft and delicate breath—
Over them murmuring low!

"Come buy—come buy!—
Hark! how the sweet things sigh
(For they have a voice like ours)
The breath of the blind girl closes
The leaves of the saddening roses.
We are tender, we sons of light,
We shrink from this child of night;
From the grasp of the blind girl free us,
We yearn for the eyes that see us.
We are for night too gay,
In your eyes we behold the day—
O buy, O buy the flowers!"

It was the blind girl, Nydia, who was singing, and when she ceased for a while there was a hush and a stillness. Glaucus advanced and selected from her basket a bunch of choice violets. Then she recommenced her song, imploring those who passed to purchase her flowers. Many loitered to listen to her sweet voice and watched her as she swung her basket to and fro.

Glaucus and Clodius were in the act of departing, when they encountered the fair Julia, on her way from the baths, who bowed to them and then passed on. While the two young men were remarking upon the maiden who had just spoken to them, they were accosted by a stately presence, and that presence no other than the dark Egyptian, Arabaces, the crafty magician. On his entrance the audience clamored in tumultuous ap-

plause and it was many minutes ere silence and order were restored. The character of Arbaces is a strong one and requires the interpretation of a master, and it was on that evening interpreted by a master and an artist. As the play progressed, the cunning treachery and the spirit of bitter hatred and revenge centered in this man of the Nile were so clearly brought to view that one felt as if he were living in the year seventy-nine and not in the dawn of the twentieth century. Reginald Clairmont had never before been seen to such masterful advantage and to exhibit such marvelous histrionic ability. His voice, though low and musical, was deep and powerful as the murmuring of the mighty sea. His gesticulations, though easy and simple, were as majestic as those befitting a Saladin, and indeed the character of the magician of the Nile was portrayed with such wonderful skill and finish and with such perfect exactness and naturalness that the audience would involuntarily pause, as it were, in order to think whether it were not really Arbaces himself.

Scene after scene followed which revealed the love of Glaucus and Ione, and which, too, unfolded the pathetic, unrequited love of the poor blind Greek girl for her master, Glaucus, the Athenian. How deeply the audience sympathized with Nydia in her sorrow of unreciprocated affections! Yet the ever-faithful Thessalonian never failed in her trust to

Glaucus, but was fidelity itself unto the very end.

On this night Helene Balfour's success far eclipsed anything she had ever hoped for or even dreamed of. She did not rant upon the stage, but her movements were easy and graceful, and she glided quietly and smoothly before the footlights. Previous to her formal appearance as an actress of any importance, the public had enjoyed very few glimpses of her, and it was greatly disappointed when it noticed on the programme that Helene Balfour, instead of Florence Grand, was to present the leading female role. As the play progressed and the plot of the story unfolded, the audience forgot its disappointment and awarded laurel after laurel to the new actress, who was so simple and beautiful, yet so queenly and majestic even in the role of Nydia, the blind Greek slave. She completely captivated her hearers, and both she and Mr. Clairmont received call after call before the curtain.

Grace Balfour as Ione and Harold Armour as Glaucus were superb. Florence Grand as Julia, Maud Hartburn as the old witch, George Eustace as Clodius, and Clement Field as Sallust were excellent, and so were the other members of the company. The banquet scene, the scenes between Arbaces, Glaucus, and Ione, and, too, the scene in the arena, were marvelous and powerful. The next to the last act included—scene first,

the liberation of Glaucus from the amphitheatre and the great eruption of Vesuvius; scene second, the interment of Pompeii, the scattering of the distracted people, and the fleeing of Glaucus and Ione; and the last scene, the third, was near a ruined temple, where, amidst falling stones and distracted people, the cunning and revengeful Arbaces discovered Glaucus and Ione almost prostrate from fear. He attempted to seize the frightened girl, when suddenly another crash, accompanied by a lurid red light, convulsed the earth and caused the collapse of a massive marble pillar, which, in falling, descended upon the crafty magician, and the soul of Arbaces the Egyptian, the man of the Nile, was sent into oblivion.

The production of that scene—the picturing of the doomed city, and of Vesuvius in the distance, with its lurid light and emitting quantities of boiling lava and hot ashes—was, though intensely horrible, magnificent and realistic in the extreme.

The last act, scene first, was the discovery of Glaucus and Ione by the ever-faithful blind girl, who, notwithstanding many perilous difficulties, led the distracted couple down to the sea, where, during a lull they embarked in a vessel far Athens. The last scene was the vessel out at sea. It was at peep of day, just when rosy dawn, drawing aside the purple draperies, smiled forth in the east. It was just at this moment that something

white was seen to descend from the vessel and glide into the blue waters below. Glaucus and Ione, who had been sweetly dreaming in the arms of Morpheus, awakened just in time to discern the white something vanish beneath the azure waves, to rise no more. They realized that the white vision was none other than the blind girl Nydia.

When the curtain had been lowered there was a hush so still that the very air itself seemed inspired with awe, and it was several minutes ere the vast audience arose to make its exit.

Ah, what a magnificent success "The Last Days of Pompeii" proved to be! The next day the critics and the newspapers sang all praises of the production. They even went so far as to declare that never before in years had New York been favored with such a combination as that of Reginald Clairmont and Helene Balfour. There was nothing wanting to the success of the play, for there was not even a hitch and everything harmonized to the minutest detail. Even as a first night it was absolutely perfect.

Helene Balfour, like Lord Byron, awoke the next morning to find herself famous—not as a poet, however, but as an actress. Mrs. Balfour, Mr. and Mrs. Kroker, and Gerald were so happy, so very happy, over the overwhelming success of Helene and Grace. What will not ambition do for one when that one is thoroughly imbued with its spirit!

CHAPTER VI

WILL-O'-THE-WISPS

In this life of ours there are will-o'-the-wisps to fortune, happiness, and pleasure. Alas, how sad to know that, after all, they are but will-o'-the-wisps to lure us on to the deep slough and there abandon us to sink to the very bottom until death rescues us! How they deceive humanity! Humanity, anyway, is more or less easily deluded. One may think that he is traveling the road to fortune, when suddenly he is plunged into bankruptcy; another may imagine that he is pursuing the avenue to happiness, when lo, his bliss is converted into misery; and still again, a man may labor under the impression that he is making rapid progress along the pathway to pleasure, but all at once a slough appears to impede his journey and he is plunged therein, never again to see the light of day. Thousands after thousands of deluded humanity seek the pathways to fortune, happiness, and pleasure, and how many are hurled on to the miry bottoms of misery and misfortune! Still more poor souls travel the highways to pleasure and think the goal

is theirs, when the will-o'-the-wisp lures them still farther on, until they are gathered closely in the arms of the miry slough and are finally choked to death.

Four men of high respectability thought they would pursue the will-o'-the-wisp to pleasure. It was one bitter cold night that the four men ensconced themselves comfortably in a magnificently appointed saloon with onyx walls, costly furnishings, and many gambling games of pool, cards, billiards, roulette, and the like. A fifth man had followed this group with the hope of inveigling his friend, who was among them, away; but his earnest attempts had proved futile, so he sadly withdrew a little distance while the quartet seated themselves at a card-table.

It was interesting to note the faces of the five. One wore an expression of serene indifference, another was smiling with the confidence of winning, the third seemed morose and embittered, the fourth was altogether savage and repulsive-looking, while the fifth, ah, what an expression was his! There lurked in his large, beautiful brown eyes, as he sat apart from the rest and watched them, a look so sad, so appealing, so yearning, that it almost lacerated one's heartstrings to see it. He, the fifth, allowed his eyes to rest on the one who sat there with the serene indifference on his face.

"What shall the game be?" asked the man with the savage countenance, whose name

was Lance, and who was a member of the orchestra of the Clairmont Theatre. "I own, Clairmont," continued Mr. Lance rather petulantly, "that you and Paxton defeated Leonard and myself badly at poker last night and I don't propose to try my luck at that game again to-night. I prefer to try something else. I know that Leonard and I can vanquish you and Paxton at anything else you attempt except poker. Can't we, old boy?"

"That we can," responded Leonard, who was the man with the morose and embittered expression.

"Well, we'll see about that," laughed Mr. Paxton, who was a pleasant-looking man, with a most genial nature.

"Yes, Paxton, you are right. We will see about it," assented Mr. Clairmont, with a faint smile.

"Leonard, don't for Pluto's sake, look so sullen," said Lance; "you look as if you were out of sorts, and you know when a man's out of sorts he can't win at anything."

"That's right, Lance, give it to him," again laughed Mr. Paxton. "If he were my partner I, too, would lay it on to him hot and heavy for being so sulky. When a man's out of sorts he certainly is not in sorts, and most assuredly is not the sort of a man to win, is he, Clairmont?"

"Of course he isn't," returned Mr. Clairmont firmly.

"Well, Lance," said Leonard impatiently, "you need not talk about people's looks. Why, you look as savage as a hyena and as if you would like to tear folks into a million pieces. People who live in glass houses mustn't throw stones," he added gruffly, with a scowl, as he leaned back in his chair.

"Don't begin scoring each other before the game commences," smiled Mr. Paxton. "Indeed," he continued, "the game has not yet been decided upon—and for you two to score each other before the cards have been dealt out is something deplorable. Clairmont, you and I are not scoring each other, are we?"

"No, indeed, Paxton. There is no need for that," and both men laughed; while the other two remained silent and glum.

"Shall it be whist, then?" grumbled Lance.

"Any old thing will suit Paxton and me," returned Mr. Clairmont, with quiet indifference, "If you and Leonard prefer it, I am sure we have no objection. Whist, you know, has been for centuries a game in which ladies and gentlemen have indulged, and was once the game of the Court. It is still a game which ladies and gentlemen enjoy, so if you two wish it, we will have their game."

"So we are agreed on whist, then?" said Leonard.

"Yes, Leonard, did you not hear?" growled Lance, with unbounded impatience.

"Paxton, you get the deal," announced

Clairmont. "Now we will have something to drink. Cards without money and a good strong beverage are devilish slow. Here, Samson," he called to a waiter who answered his summons, "bring us our usual number of cock-tails and several bottles of your best champagne, and let me remind you that we don't want any sham about it, either. That you brought us last night was not so good as it might have been. Samson, you know exactly what we want. Bring it at once, will you, and don't lag about it and keep us waiting," and he slapped several greenbacks down upon the table.

"Yes, Mr. Clairmont, I knows what you want an' I'll sho do my best," said Samson, pocketing the money and withdrawing. In a few minutes more he was back again with bottles, glasses, and so forth.

The man with the large, expressive brown eyes, who had been sitting apart from the four, now approached the table, and laying his hand affectionately upon his friend's shoulder, said sadly, "Clairmont, dear old friend, please come away with me from this place. I implore you not to drink and gamble any more! Last night, you remember, you were so drunk that you had lost all reason. What will your old father say when he knows you continue to indulge in these disgusting habits? Think, my friend, think what he will say. You know he said that when you became an actor your life would be spent in dis-

sipation. Are you going to let his prophecies be fulfilled? Think, Clairmont, dear old friend, what your father's feelings will be! Think how it will mortify and crush him to know you, his only child, in whom he took so much pride and pleasure, let all his plans be blighted and all his hopes be shattered."

"Armour, if you want to preach to anybody, you may preach to Percival as long as you like, but you must not preach to me," said Clairmont impatiently. "My father and I are fond of each other. He knows well enough that I can take care of myself. Come, boys, let us have a drink," with which the four gulped down glass upon glass of champagne.

"Well, Clairmont," said Armour, with unshed tears in his eyes and in his voice, "it seems that you cannot take care of yourself when you behave like this. You know very well that Percival and I have had to escort you home night after night for the last eight or nine months. Are you going to keep it up until it kills you?"

"Well, Armour," growled Clairmont, almost savagely, "if you wish to remain with me you must cease your preaching, for I will have no more of it. If you like, you may sit near the table and watch the game, but I tell you, for the last time, that I will not have any more of your bosh about my conduct. I am a man and not a child, and if I want any preaching I will go to the churches

and listen to the deacons, parsons, priests, and whatnot. I assure you that that calling is not in the slightest degree suitable to you. Will you have a glass?"

"No, thank you."

"Then if you won't, I will," and with that he gulped down several more glasses. Armour endeavored to prevent him, but all to no purpose. The other three followed their comrade's example and greedily swallowed glass after glass.

"Clairmont," said Armour, "I regret if I have offended you." Then, after a moment he continued in pleading tones: "Dear old friend, can I not dissuade you from participating in such horrible vices? What will your dear wife think when she sees you come in after all your promises to her? I know she thought when she married you she had married a gentleman, but instead she has discovered, alas, that she has a drunkard and a gambler for a husband."

"Oh, confound what that woman thinks or discovers!" exclaimed Clairmont angrily, taking up his hand and betting a large sum of money.

"Yes, confound what er that er—woman think or—or discovers. She is—er—er nobody. Who—er—cares what she er—thinks?" roared Lance, after having gulped down his fourth cocktail.

"What—er—is that y-you say, you infamous scoundrel? Lance, you—are—are—

mad—be—because Helene Balfour re—refused you and—and ac—accepted me. How—dare y—you say such things a—about my wife! Confounded wretch, I er—will kill you—for this!” exclaimed Claimont in a rage, as he rose from his chair, his eyes glaring and his face bloated and scarlet. He prepared to strike, but, in the act, he sank back in his seat and stared into vacancy, so overcome was he with champagne and cocktails.

All except Harold Armour had imbibed so freely that they were utterly unable to think or act rationally. All the winter these four men had repaired to this saloon, which was so elegant and alluring, and had gambled and drank until early in the morning. Indeed, the saloon was, as it were, a will-o'-the-wisp, a place of beauty and wickedness to tempt men. It was, as they thought, a place to enjoy pleasure, but it was really nothing more than a bright will-o'-the-wisp to lure the poor, deluded, wretched creatures into the deep and darkened slough.

These four men had haunted the place after the play was over and Mr. Clairmont had been eminently successful in winning. Perhaps he and Lance would play against each other and the three others, Leonard, Paxton, and Armour, would quietly be spectators. Then, again, he and Paxton would challenge Lance and Leonard. All along it had been Lance's wish to ruin Mr. Clairmont,

because Helene Balfour had rejected him and become Mrs. Clairmont. Now it was his especial desire to wreak some revenge on the great actor, not only because of his disappointment in love, but because, too, of the heavy losses he had sustained. Indeed, Reginald Clairmont had compelled this man to file a petition in bankruptcy. To-night, however, as they all left the saloon in a most disgraceful condition, Lance determined more than ever that he and Leonard would in some way wreak a terrible vengeance on Helene or her husband, cost what it might.

Harold Armour and Percival assisted Mr. Clairmont into a closed carriage and the coachman was directed to drive to the Clairmont home. As the carriage pursued its way along the paved streets, Harold Armour was sadly meditating upon the unfortunate events of the evening and of the past winter. It hurt, nay, it crushed him so to behold his friend in so disgraceful a condition, and he felt, too, that Percival, the valet, would no longer have respect for his master. It pained him deeply to know how Reginald's conduct distressed the old man and Helene, his lovely young wife.

Mr. Armour had always accompanied his friend to the saloon with the hope of dissuading him and inveigling him away, but he realized now that all his efforts had proved futile and come to naught. It seemed to Har-

old, as they moved along, that the world was full of will-o'-the-wisps to lure men into the dark and unfathomable sloughs. Yet he thought it was man's and not God's doings, and if man would, he could avoid and resist even the greatest of all these temptations.

CHAPTER VII

SHADOWS AND DARKNESS

Helene Balfour and Reginald Clairmont were married on Sunday, January the second, by Bishop Gaynes. It occurred a few months after her formal debut as an actress in the role of "Nydia," in which she achieved such magnificent success. Over nine months had elapsed since that Sunday in January when Helene became Mrs. Clairmont, and it was now the middle of October, and she and her husband were appearing in "Onita," a sweet and simple drama, replete with humor and pathos, exquisitely realistic, which promised to be the theatrical success of the season.

Those few months of wedded life were not ones of connubial bliss to Helene, but months of almost unendurable agony. Reginald had promised that if she would become his wife he would henceforth renounce "Prince Alcohol" and the card-table. He had, however, violated that promise, gambling and drinking even more than ever. Every time he was brought home she felt that she could not endure a repetition of the scene, yet, as night succeeded night, she suffered new agonies,

new insults, until the crisis was reached, when she was compelled to inform him that she could not, and would no longer undergo such agonies and be taunted by his insults, and that she intended to file a suit for divorce. This information he did not heed, but became more and more enslaved by the wine-cup and the card-table.

What endurance, what devotion, and what faithfulness are woman's! Some, and indeed a great many men, are such despicable brutes as to commit all sorts of outrages to try, to the last degree, a woman's patience, love, and trustfulness, and in nine cases out of ten, when that end has been accomplished, they go rejoicing on their way and abandon that noble woman to hopeless despair and misery. When a woman loves, her love is as unfathomable as the deepest seas and as true as God's glorious, golden stars that shimmer and sparkle in the infinite blue ether far away. No matter what sins the man of her heart commits, she loves him and is faithful to him unto the end.

Helene felt that if Reginald Clairmont had loved her as fervently as he had declared, he would not have said nor done the slightest thing to cause her pain.

When a man loves truly he will do nothing to displease, nor will he occasion the slightest suffering to the woman he loves, and if a man be a man truly, he will disdain to wound the feelings of a noble woman.

"Onita," the simple drama of love, humor, and pathos at the Clairmont Theatre, continued to score an unlimited success, and the receipts were large and heavy. It was one evening, after a performance of that refreshing little drama of sweet simplicity, that Reginald Clairmont, with his four companions repaired to that palatial saloon, a place of so much vice and wickedness, to repeat his old habits. Harold Armour, of course, constituted one of the four companions. He was a man of no ordinary worth, and when he was a friend to any one his friendship was so true and so lasting that it could undergo the test of many fires. He exerted every effort to dissuade Reginald from pursuing his evil course, and he thought that his presence would induce his friend to forbear taking so much strong drink and betting too heavily, but he sadly discovered that his presence proved entirely ineffectual.

About two in the morning Helene was awakened by a lumbering noise on the staircase. She knew immediately what it was, so she hastily donned her slippers and a simple morning gown of blue silk and lace. Then she hurriedly arranged the heavy masses of her blue-black hair in a large coil at the back of her head. By the time she had put the room in order, Mr. Armour and Percival entered, almost dragging Reginald, who was in such a horrible state of intoxication that he was unable to raise his head. They placed

him upon the bed, and as she watched him reclining there, almost in a stupor, she thought she had never seen him look so beastly. His cheeks were crimson and bloated, his eyes, though closed, were bloodshot, he breathed heavily, and his arms hung lifeless by his side.

Harold Armour noticed that Helene was pale and haggard, and that beneath her eyes there were purple rings, which enhanced their beauty and deep violet color. He noticed, too, with what intense scorn and contempt she regarded her drunken husband. After they had administered hot tea and milk to Mr. Clairmont, he prepared to take his leave.

"Harold," said Helene in an agonizing voice, as she took his hand in hers and looked up into his noble, manly face, "how can I ever thank you for your ever-thoughtful and unremitting kindness to Reginald and me? O, Harold, I feel so grateful, so very grateful to you," she continued with deep emotion, "and, too, I feel so blessed that Grace possesses the love of so noble a man as you. I shall always pray for your happiness. As there are only a few hours before morning, and as you have done all that you possibly can do, I will not detain you. Let me thank you once more before you go."

For a moment Harold Armour stood motionless. He was unable to speak, for his heart was too full and there was a great lump

in his throat. In another moment, after he had somewhat regained his composure, he bent over the hand he held and silently and reverently touched it with his lips. When he was gone, Percival disrobed the intoxicated man and put him in bed.

"Percival, before you retire, please bring in another pitcher of milk, so that I may administer to him until he falls asleep."

The valet soon returned with the soothing liquid, and after inquiring if there were further duties and receiving an answer in the negative, quietly withdrew.

Helene gave him more of the cooling and quieting beverage, and soon the patient stirred and murmured some incoherent sentences. Then suddenly he said in a thick, heavy voice, "Helene do er—yo—you know—er—er what—Lan—Lance said—a—about you—er this ev—evening? He—he said, ha, ha, ha!" and Mr. Clairmont laughed loudly. Then he continued in the same heavy tones, "He said—you—you were—no—nobody and he—er—is—right a—about it, too, for—for—no wo—woman who is an actress has—has any—honor. Ha, ha, ha!" and he again laughed loudly. After a slight pause he resumed, his tongue almost cleaving to the roof of his mouth. "I—er—er—tried—to—to kill—him er—but"—there his voice subsided to a low murmur and, losing all control over himself, he sank into a heavy slumber.

From that moment Helene's deep love turned to the most intense and bitter hatred. She determined then and there that under no consideration would she continue to live with so despicable a man. She made up her mind that she would immediately pack her effects, return to her mother, and enter proceedings for divorce.

That morning, when she had partaken of a light breakfast, Helene entered the library, where she found old Mr. Clairmont, half-reclining in his easy chair, and she thought as he rested there that he seemed older and more feeble than he had for a long time. After the usual greetings, the old man raised his shapely head, white as the driven snow, and with tears in his eyes and in his voice, he said, "Oh, Helene, my child, you cannot know how deep is my suffering! It is breaking my heart, a poor old man's heart, a proud father's heart, who had centered all his proud hopes, all his deep love in his son, and it has come to this! Oh, God, I believe it will kill me!" and the proud old man, bent with age and sorrow, buried his face in his hands and sobbed like a child.

Helene turned to the window and looked out upon the wet pavement and the dreary gray sky. No, she would not shed one tear about the man who, in his drunken spells, had subjected her to the grossest insults and then, afterwards in his sane moments, asked her to forgive him if in any way he had offended or

maltreated her. Indeed, in his sober moments, Reginald Clairmont almost worshiped his wife; but now, as she stood at the window, Helene did not think of that. She thought only of his insulting words. From that moment her face became as hard and cold as marble, she rarely if ever smiled, and her nearest friends and relatives would oftentimes wonder if she had a heart.

For a while she remained standing at the window, then she turned and saw that the old man had not raised his head from his hands, but he had ceased sobbing. For a moment she stood watching him, then she crossed the room, and kneeling beside his chair laid one arm up about his neck. Her heart was replete with sympathy for this poor old man, who had been almost a father to her since she came to his home, and whose dearest hopes were now all shattered forever. Her love, too was dead; dead forever never again to be quickened.

Mr. Clairmont raised his silvery head and said with almost overwhelming despair: "God knows, Helene, I have done all that a father could do for a son, and Reginald's return for it all is only black ingratitude. Though you are an actress, Helene, I would have made no objection to my son's marrying you, for, dear child, I have learned to love you and trust you with all my heart, and as an own daughter. If either of you secure a divorce, it is my wish and my will that you

receive, at my death, a handsome sum. Your father and I were law partners and he was my dearest friend. My child, I did all I could to prevent him from involving himself in such rash speculations, but he persistently refused to adopt any of my advice, and died leaving you, your sister, and your mother almost nothing."

Helene was silent a moment, overcome by emotion. Then she rose and said, with deep feeling: "You have, indeed, been the best and kindest of friends to Grace and mother, and a second father to me. You can never know how deeply grateful I am to you for all that you have done."

"Ah, my child," sighed the old man, "I have only tried to do my duty. Moreover, who could fail to love and respect such a woman as you? Helene, you can never imagine how deeply it pains me to know of your untold suffering, and to know, too, what a beast of a husband Reginald is and has been to you."

At this Helene's face became tense and hard. She thought of revealing to him her decision, but then she reflected that it would only augment his grief, so withheld it.

Mr. Clairmont regarded her wistfully for a long time and then said: "Helene, how is Reginald this morning? I was awake and heard them bring him in last night."

"He was asleep when I came down stairs. I presume he is as well as usual," she replied,

coldly. Then, after a moment she said, "It is quite time I was hurrying to the rehearsal," and with that she bade the old man good-bye and was soon walking rapidly along the wet pavement.

It was one of those dreary, disagreeable days; the atmosphere was warm and humid, the sky was of a monotonous gray, and everything, even life itself, seemed to Helene that morning to be of a dark, monotonous hue. When she entered the Clairmont Theatre she found all the company present except her husband. As she approached, every one noticed that she was pale and worn.

"Helene, are you ill?" tenderly inquired Grace, when she had kissed her sister.

"No."

"Then what is the matter this morning, that you look so pale?" she persisted anxiously.

"Nothing, Grace."

At that moment Mr. Manlyn approached. He seemed somewhat annoyed, and said rather sharply: "Good morning, Mrs. Clairmont. How is it that you and your husband are late?"

"Here comes Clairmont now," announced Eustace. Every member of the company and of the orchestra, with the exception of Lance and Leonard, greeted Reginald most cordially, and he greeted them likewise in return. Then he joined the group composed of Helene, Grace, Harold Armour, and Mr.

Manlyn, who said, "What caused you to be a little late, Clairmont?"

"I slept too long, I guess," was the indifferent reply.

"You ought to wake up in time to keep your appointments, sir," reprimanded Mr. Manlyn severely as he turned away. Harold Armour glanced at his friend, but said nothing.

"Mr. Manlyn," said Helene turning toward the manager, "I am not at all well to-day, and I do not feel that I shall be able to play this evening. I should be so glad and so grateful if you would permit Florence Grand to assume my role."

"Mrs. Clairmont," returned the manager kindly, "I see you are not well and I think if you rest a few days you will feel better. It shall be as you wish. Miss Grand will assume the role until your return, which, I trust, will be very soon. The New York public will greatly miss you and it will await your reappearance with a great deal of impatience.

"I appreciate your kind words, Mr. Manlyn, and I thank you," was her earnest reply. She was turning away, when she was accosted by her husband.

"Helene, why did you not wait for me?" he said.

As she looked at the man before her, with his bloodshot eyes, crimson and bloated features, and his rather careless appearance, she knew that dissipation was beginning to im-

print its marks of vulgarity and sensualism on his face; the face of the man whom she once loved and for whom she now felt a most intense hatred and contempt. A fine scorn flashed in her dark eyes and her voice was cold and piercing as she answered, "Mr. Clairmont, you were asleep when I came down stairs, so I decided to come without you."

"Why did you not awaken me?"

Her eyes flashed angrily, and her voice, though calm, became freezing and more scornful when she replied, "Because, Mr. Clairmont, it is better to let an intoxicated man sleep off his beastliness and his drunkenness."

Reginald Clairmont flushed and only said, "Helene, after the rehearsal I shall stop a moment at the Garrick Club."

"You may linger at the club as long as it suits your desire," she replied, and with that she turned and left the theatre.

As Helene wended her way home, she wondered why it was that a man young, handsome, wealthy, of high social position, and with the brightest prospects, should plunge into dissipation and wreck his whole life. Why should any man, she thought, so waste his life, that which God had given him? No matter how much physical courage a man may have it does not condone his lack of moral courage, and a man most certainly lacks moral courage when he surrenders himself to

the passions. He is a coward, a moral coward, who will allow the passions full sway, for they are earthly and cultivated tendencies, and no one should foster that which is not divine. But some will argue that the passions were implanted within us from infancy. Whosoever should argue such an idea is a materialist, for God is all love and all that is good, true and beautiful; indeed, He is the *Summum Bonum* and He would implant within us only that which is good. Our ancestors cultivated the passions and we inherited their cultivated tendencies, for they are nothing more than tendencies. Some regard love as one of the passions, and if, they argue, it be classed as one of them, must it be disregarded? It is true that love is esteemed as one of the passions; but the passions are divided into two classes—the lower or satanic and the higher or divine. The lower or satanic are inherited tendencies, inaugurated and fostered by our ancestors, and the higher or divine are those feelings that emanate from God and are inherent within us from our earliest infancy. God would not inspire within us that which is evil and wicked, but He would implant within us only that which is good, pure, and beautiful.

As Helene reached her own door she arrived at the conclusion that Reginald Clairmont must have inherited his love for cards and wine from some of his ancestors who were members of the king's household and

who imbibed freely and gambled recklessly at whist with the ladies.

When she reached the library door, Helene determined to confide her decision to her father-in-law, but when she entered the room she saw that he had not stirred, but remained in his easy chair, with his hands clasped upon his knee, while his white head drooped upon his breast. How very old and feeble he looked as he sat there! He did not speak, nor raise his head as Helene approached him. She laid her hand upon his clasped ones and they felt cold and clammy. She raised his head and the fine dark eyes glared at her with a deep, sorrowful expression. How glad Helene was that she had not told him before she went to the rehearsal for the old man was dead. He had died of a broken heart. She felt that to him all was light, life and sunshine, while to her all seemed shadows and darkness.

CHAPTER VIII

STRANGERS

It was the first of December, and Helene Clairmont was a free woman, for a decree of divorce had been granted her only a few days before. A week following old Mr. Clairmont's funeral, Helene had packed her effects and returned to her mother; shortly afterward she was dangerously ill with brain fever and was sick for several weeks. The day Gerald handed her the papers granting her a legal separation from her husband she was seated near the window, where the glorious, golden sunshine crept in and flooded the room with its bright morning light.

During her illness and after her convalescence, Reginald Clairmont had called to implore her to forgive and forget and to come back to him ere it was too late and the divorce granted. He promised all that a man could promise to the woman that he loves, to induce her to return, but Helene was inexorable. She was not to be persuaded, and treated his pleadings with proud contempt.

It was Sunday evening. Mr. Armour, who was now included as a member of the Kroker

household, and all the family, except Gerald, were seated in the library. Grace, as usual, was seated on a divan beside Harold.

Gerald had been invited to tea at Myriam Chelcy's and had gone out early in the afternoon. Helene, as usual, was ensconced in her easy chair. She wore a gown of soft pink chiffon, which was extremely becoming, and in which she looked lovely as the mellow light fell upon her. It was the hour before tea, and just as the clock chimed six, Janet, Helene's maid, entered and announced that a gentleman was below who desired an audience with Helene.

"Did he send a card, Janet?"

"No, madame," answered Janet, who was a comely little French girl, with black eyes and hair and rosy cheeks. She had been with Helene ever since her debut as an actress, and was perfectly devoted to her and Grace.

"Have you ever seen the gentleman before?"

"Sure, madame. He's been to the house plenty of times."

"Then, what is his name?" queried Grace.

"Janet," said Helene, not waiting for the maid to reply, "if you are quite sure that he has visited here a number of times, you may show him up. I shall receive him here."

"But, my dear," remonstrated Mrs. Balfour, "do you feel sufficiently well to see any one?"

"Yes, mother, I feel quite well. I think if I see a good friend he will cause me to feel ever so much better."

"I think so too," observed Mr. Armour, with a smile.

"So do I," echoed Grace.

"Then you may usher him up, Janet," directed Mrs. Balfour.

"Perhaps he will remain to tea," suggested Mrs. Kroker with a smile.

"Then, Helene, my dear, we shall have a glimpse of your friend."

"I hope I can prevail on him to remain to tea, Aunt Julia," replied Helene simply.

"My dear, you must not fail to invite him, for I want to know him and see if he really has been here before."

"Aunt Julia, if he be a man I really like, I shall be very glad indeed to have him to tea and I shall certainly ask him."

"I think it is high time we were taking our departure," said Mr. Kroker, rising. "The man did not come to see us."

"Uncle George, I am sorry to inconvenience you."

"That is all right, my dear. We don't mind," returned the old man kindly.

When they had retired, Helene wondered who it could be to refuse his name. She clasped her slender white hands in her lap and recalled the names of her many friends, but could not decide upon any of them. Suddenly it flashed across her mind that it might

be the unknown friend who had been so kind as to send her most beautiful flowers every day during her illness, and every day, too, since her recovery. Gerald had visited, many times, the office of the florist to inquire the name of the donor, but the man was obstinate and positively refused to divulge any name or even furnish the slightest clew. So Helene finally decided that it was the kind unknown friend who had sent the flowers, who desired to see her.

She was still thinking of the man and the flowers, when the door was quietly opened and a tall figure, clad in a handsome black suit, stood on the threshold. He silently awaited his welcome. It was with unconcealed admiration that he gazed upon the proud, beautiful woman before him, as she sat there so still, with her hands clasped in her lap, her lips slightly parted, her delicately-flushed cheeks and her dark, unfathomable violet eyes looking dreamily into vacancy. As Helene raised her head she encountered the deep, earnest gaze of the figure on the threshold. How quickly her expression changed. Her face become pale and rigid, her lips tightly compressed, her hands clenched the soft folds of her gown, and in her velvety eyes there lurked the most intense scorn and bitter hatred, and in her scorn she seemed, as she rose and stood leaning against the chair she had vacated, even more proud, more queenly, and more beautiful.

"Why are you here?" she demanded with freezing coldness. "Have you come here again to goad my very life out of me by trying to urge me to come back to you? Have you come here to parade your affected distress at my securing a divorce? Do you once imagine that after all your insults to me I shall for one instant return to you, you whom I know to be a drunkard, a gambler, a reprobate? Once for all I say no, a thousand times no! No inducement you can offer will change me. I am inexorable."

Helene had displayed no anger whatever. She stood quietly leaning against a chair, and when she had spoken her voice was calm and cold. Reginald Clairmont drew nearer. His recent dissipation had left him much worn and haggard. His fine dark eyes rested on Helene with a yearning tenderness and there was an exquisite emotion in his deep voice.

"Helene, do you know what harsh epithets you have used? Though you denominate me a drunkard and a gambler, yet I am not quite a reprobate, not quite that, Helene. God knows I am not quite that," and as he uttered the last few words his voice rang with a deep agony, a deep despair. After a few moments, in which he somewhat recovered himself, he said, "Helene, God will be my witness that, if you will come back to me, I will forever abandon drinking and gambling."

"Yes, Reginald, you have often made that promise to me when I threatened to secure a divorce, and how often, too, have you violated it," said Helene, with quiet contempt.

In his dark eyes there still dwelt that yearning tenderness and in his voice there was a deep huskiness. "Helene, God knows that if you will return to me I will give up everything. I will give up anything. I will even sacrifice my art, my wealth, my profession, all, and live in private life if you wish it. You, whom I love so utterly; you, for whom I would sacrifice anything, everything, my life even to render you happy; it is for you, the only woman I have ever loved, or can or ever will love; it is for you, Helene, for you only, that I am willing to sacrifice so much and whom I would entreat so ardently to again become my wife. If it be your wish, I will return to Lance and Leonard every cent that I have ever won from them. Helene, even though you and I are divorced, we can be quietly married. God knows that I have resolved to be a better man, and I swear that I will if it kills me. Will you trust me once more, only once more, and let me prove to you that I can and will be a better man? Helene, my light, my life, my soul, will you not come back to me and trust me once more? Helene, will you come?" and Reginald Clairmont extended his arms toward the woman he loved, to welcome her back to his

home and his heart. A bright, tender light shone in his eyes while he awaited her answer.

She did not speak, but stood toying with the pink satin ribbon at her belt. Conflicting emotions assailed her heart, yet her face betrayed none of them, but remained perfectly cold and impassive.

"Tell me, Helene, my darling, will you forgive? It is much to ask, I know; it is, indeed, far too much that I should dare ask it. I beg you to forgive, but I will not ask you to forget or even return my love. Helene, you do not know, you cannot know what you are to me."

What a beautifully rich contralto voice was Helene Clairmont's, and it thrilled him when the first words escaped her lips: "Reginald, we are separated once and forever."

At this Mr. Clairmont folded his arms across his broad chest and a cold, hard expression supplanted the light that a moment before had illumined his face. He awaited, with callous indifference, the verdict that he saw was inevitable. She, too, had grown hard and indifferent.

"For nine long months I endured your insults and suffered untold agony at your hand. No one can imagine what my sufferings were. Never, no never, shall I forget the night, or rather the morning, before your father's death, when you were brought home. Never shall I forget what you said to me then and how, as I watched you, you seemed to me

more like a hideous beast than a human being. Dare you once imagine that I still love such a man, who murdered his devoted old father and crushed the love of a faithful woman? Dare you once think that I still love you after all that? Do you think that a woman's love will live forever in her breast, when her husband cruelly mortifies her, nay, almost disgraces her? Dare you ask me to come to you after all that? Do you think I am nothing more than a toy to amuse you and to come and go at your bidding? Come back to you? No, a thousand times no! I would rather die a thousand deaths than to return to you. My love for you has been crushed. It is dead and its ashes have been buried, buried forever. Instead of loving you, I hate and despise you, I utterly loathe you. Henceforward we shall be strangers, never again to speak or even recognize each other. If we chance to meet, you must not expect me to speak and I shall not expect you."

"Helene, will you not relent?"

"No, never," she answered with proud contempt.

"May I ask if you intend retaining the name Clairmont, or resuming your maiden name?"

"I shall continue to bear the name Clairmont."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Clairmont, with bitter scorn, "that so proud and queenly a wo-

man as yourself would refuse to bear the name of the man who once had the honor of being your husband, but who has now unfortunately been deprived of that honor. It seems that you would abhor the name, since it is the name of a man who is a confirmed drunkard and gambler. Ah, it is indeed strange that you should condescend to bear it. You must regard it as condescension indeed!"

"Mr. Clairmont, let me say that you labor under mistaken ideas. I do not regard it a condescension, but I esteem it a privilege and an honor. Your father was one of the truest and noblest of men. He was a second father to Grace and me and he was, too, my own dear father's law partner and dearest friend."

"But," returned Mr. Clairmont in very sarcastic tones, "it was through me that you were entitled to bear that name."

"If I had been your father I should have completely disowned you. Henceforward I shall think of you as the son of some other Clairmont, and not bearing the name of your noble father or that of his nearest relations. I shall think of you as the son of some other man who was not worthy to bear the name of Clairmont, and you, his son, as following in his wake by disgracing so noble a name."

"Mrs. Clairmont," said Mr. Clairmont, with most acute sarcasm, "permit me to say that I am truly grateful to you for not resuming your maiden name, but for retaining, not

mine, but my noble father's name. Am I privileged to inquire what plans you have made?" he asked after a short pause. "Manlyn informed me that you have severed all connections with my company and that you have arranged to play with Stuart Hartburn next season. Doubtless you know that Stuart Hartburn is a brother to Maud Hartburn of my company."

"Mr. Manlyn has informed you correctly. The remainder of this season I shall rest and next season I shall occupy the position as leading woman in Mr. Hartburn's company. Is your curiosity satisfied?"

"Mrs. Clairmont, my dearest wish is that the choicest blessings may become yours. We shall miss you beyond expression. Your work is of that description which artists and the great classic world recognize as true art. Never will Florence Grand equal you."

"Thank you, Mr. Clairmont," said Helene, proudly inclining her head.

"Helene, God knows I shall always wish you well and that sweet happiness may be yours." Mr. Clairmont paused for a moment. Then, in an entirely different tone, he resumed: "Mrs. Clairmont, some day I shall prove to you that I can bear my name and my dear father's name with glory and honor, and you, yes, you yourself, shall be proud of me. Then you will rue the day when you scorned me and refused to come back to me."

"God grant that I shall never regret it!" exclaimed Helene, clasping her hands and leaning against the back of a chair. She felt that she would never regret not having accepted his offer, even if he become the greatest celebrity the world had ever known.

"Helene," said Mr. Clairmont coldly, "you have rendered the verdict. Henceforth we shall meet, not as friends nor even as acquaintances, but as perfect strangers. So be it. I accept the decision without a murmur, nay, with polite indifference. I am sincerely glad that you regard the situation so calmly and so lightly. Mrs. Clairmont, if you will ever condescend to permit me to render you a service, I shall be most happy."

He had reached the door, when she remarked indifferently, "Thank you, Mr. Clairmont; I appreciate your interest in me."

When he was gone and the door had been closed behind him, Helene threw herself into a chair and buried her face in her hands against the back of it, remaining thus for a long time. She did not weep, but her conscience was sharply upbraiding her for her coldness to the man who had offered to sacrifice so much for her happiness. Did she deserve such unselfish love? Was she worthy of so great a sacrifice from so proud a man? And was she worthy of such a man, who gave her his whole heart, his whole soul; who would abandon art, profession, all, for her sake? Did a cold, proud, beautiful woman

deserve so noble and unremitting a love? What will not love do! What will not a man or a woman do for the one loved! Each will sacrifice his or her happiness, his or her all for the one whom he or she truly and really loves. Helene's conscience was telling her all this when those who retired from the room returned.

"Helene, who was it that called? What did he want? Did you ask him to remain to tea?" queried Grace all in one breath.

"Grace, you must not besiege her with questions. Give her time. She is not going out," laughed Harold Armour, seating himself on the divan and drawing his fiancée down beside him.

"Helene, are not you going to satisfy our curiosity and give us a full account of your friend?" inquired her mother, all impatience to know.

"It was," said Helene indifferently, "Reginald Clairmont, and you can imagine the rest."

"Why did he not come right up, or send his card, or announce himself, or do something like that?" asked Grace.

"Grace, you know very well why. He knew that if I were informed that it was he I should refuse to see him, that is all."

"But, my dear, you should not be so heartless, for Reginald Clairmont is truly a noble man. He has changed much. It grieves me so to know that my daughter is so unfeeling and so unforgiving. He called yesterday and

told me that he would sacrifice everything if you would reconsider and become his wife, even if you withheld your love. I have never seen a man love a woman so utterly, so manly, as Reginald Clairmont loves you. As deep as my love is for you, Helene—and you know that I would not have your happiness sacrificed at any cost,—I feel that he is going to make a man of himself.”

“Indeed he will,” said Harold, “for I know it to be a fact that he has not visited any saloons—or will-o’-the-wisps, as I call them—since his father’s death. Neither has he gambled nor partaken of any stimulant.”

“Harold, why do you speak of saloons as will-o’-the-wisps?” questioned Grace, tenderly regarding him.

“Dear heart,” he answered, “I denominate them will-o’-the-wisps because they, with all of their brilliant lights, their gambling tables, and their sparkling wines, lure men into them and cause the deluded creatures to imagine that they are enjoying pleasure, or, for a time at least, that they are drowning their sorrows. What foolish and erroneous ideas some men entertain. The saloons are lights or will-o’-the-wisps seen from a distance, to lure men on until they are eventually plunged into a deep and miry slough, there to be caught and swallowed up. Clairmont has seen, before it is too late, I am thankful to say, what the results would have been had he persisted in his old habits. He and I enjoyed a long talk

last night after the play, and he told me that as long as he lived, never would he gamble nor taste wine again, unless he were at a dinner or some social function where he felt that he was obliged to do so. He is a man of very strong will and determination, and I am certain that he will accomplish his purpose, even if it be under pain of death. I will wager my all, except Grace, that Reginald Clairmont will be one of the noblest and grandest men and that we all shall be very proud of him."

As the last sentence escaped his lips a smile of confidence and happiness irradiated Harold's features. All saw that Harold Armour was a friend to Reginald and that his confidence and love for his friend would never waver. How rare is true friendship! When one possesses the really true friendship of another, that one should value it and guard it as he would one of his most cherished treasures. Such a friendship existed among George Chelcy, Gerald Kroker, Harold Armour, and Reginald Clairmont. Indeed, these four were the best of friends, and any one of them was ever ready to confer a favor on the other. They were a happy four that frequently met at the houses of one another or perchance at the Garrick Club, a club principally for theatrical people. Their meetings had been somewhat suspended since the death of old Mr. Clairmont.

"My advice to you, Harold Armour," said Helene, with mocking scorn, "is that you be careful how you stake your all. There is no telling about a reformed man."

"Helene," exclaimed Mrs. Balfour; "why I am perfectly shocked!"

Helene disregarded her mother's exclamation. And continued: "It is not well to place too much faith in a man of vicious habits who promises to reform and become a changed being. A reformed man very, very rarely remains reformed. They are clever about making promises, but they never adhere to them. Men, too, are very selfish creatures. When they marry they expect the woman to give up everything, to sacrifice all for their sake, while they give only a part and sacrifice nothing. Before marriage it is all love, love, but afterwards their love has flown to the winds. It is said that if one do not love, one's heart will dry up. Before marriage men are willing their hearts should be humid and fertile, but afterwards they are perfectly indifferent about their drying up and becoming deserts."

"Helene, I wouldn't be so pessimistic, if I were you," said Grace petulantly.

"That certainly has been my observation, God knows I wish I could take a more optimistic view of such things," said Helene bitterly.

"Grace, you don't class me as one of those men, do you? Haven't you more faith in

me?" inquired Harold earnestly, as he gazed lovingly into the sweet face of the woman he loved.

"Harold, I love you and I trust you," returned Grace tenderly in a low voice.

"Ah, Grace," said Helene almost desperately, "you do not know, you cannot know what it is to have a man tell you that he loves you and then after you are married to him to have him cruelly insult and almost disgrace you." When she ceased speaking Helene was so agitated that she shook from head to foot.

After a long pause, Harold said in a deep husky voice, "God grant that, when we are married, I may be a true and noble husband to you, Grace."

"God grant that you will!" she answered earnestly.

Then they all went in to tea.

CHAPTER IX

THE CHELCYS

It was on a bright but cold Sunday morning in January that the Chelcys were seated at breakfast. They were three in number—the father, an old man with soft, gray hair; his son George, a handsome man of about thirty, and Myriam, a bright, pretty young woman of about twenty. On this particular Sunday Myriam had invited several of her friends to come in the evening to enjoy some very fine music, Mr. Schloss, a magnificent pianist, and Herr Carlyr, an accomplished violinist, having promised to play for her. As she sat at breakfast Myriam thought of the little affair and said, with a frown which somewhat marred the delicate beauty of her face, “Do you know, I am very much worried about it.”

“About what, my dear?” inquired her father with a fond look in his kindly eyes.

“It is just that I am going to have some people here this evening to enjoy a little music. Mr. Schloss and Herr Carlyr have promised to play for me. Two people whom I have invited will, I am afraid, feel somewhat uncomfortable when they get here.”

"Why should any one feel so, my dear? I want you to make it as pleasant as possible for every one."

"Indeed, father, George and I shall endeavor to make it enjoyable. But what worries me is that Mr. and Mrs. Clairmont are coming, and they have not spoken for over two years. If one did not know them, one would conclude that they were strangers and that an introduction had never passed between them."

"It is indeed sad," said Mr. Chelcy, "Are Mrs. Balfour and Miss Grace unfriendly to him?"

"No, father, they are good friends. Grace and Mr. Clairmont are especially so. She is still a member of his company. Helene, however, is Mr. Stuart Hartburn's leading lady; and she has been with him for over a year and a half."

"Yes, I knew she was with him."

At this point the three rose from the table and adjourned to the library. When they were seated, old Mr. Chelcy said, "George, are you and Myriam going to church to-day?"

"No, father, I don't feel like it," replied George somewhat sleepily.

"Neither do I," answered Myriam simply.

When old Mr. Chelcy had perused the morning paper, he quietly took up his hat and went out. After he was gone, George said, "Mym, did I ever tell you what Mrs. Clair-

mont said to Clairmont the other evening at Hansell's dinner?"

"You know very well that you have not mentioned anything about Mr. Hansell's dinner to me."

"Well, as you are not acquainted with Hansell, you have heard that he is a most ardent devotee of the stage. Indeed, most of his friends are members of that profession. At his quarters last Thursday evening he gave a dinner in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Clairmont."

"Doesn't he know that they are not on speaking terms?"

"Yes, he has always known it. He said he was not going to worry himself about it; that he was going to have them, and so he did. Of course he said he knew it would be a trifle embarrassing, but he was not to be worried about it. Well, the evening arrived, and the guests assembled. When Helene and Grace entered the room there was an excited murmur of admiration. Grace was gowned in pink and looked radiantly lovely. In all my life, Mym, I have never seen so beautiful a woman as Helene Clairmont. Though her face wears a cold, proud expression, and she seems utterly heartless, yet her purity of character and superb intelligence shine forth and enhance her beauty. She was gowned in white and wore a bunch of white carnations at her breast and in her rich, dark hair. She and Grace were acquainted with everybody there, for all were members of

their profession, except Kroker, Hansell, of course and myself. As I said, when they entered, she and Grace excited much admiration. They greeted every one cordially, Eustace, Clairmont, and myself were standing together in front of the mantel and we advanced a few steps to greet them as they stood in conversation with Hansell and several others. Grace was very friendly to all three of us, but Helene spoke only to Eustace and myself and completely ignored Clairmont."

"Was it very noticeable?"

"I should say it was."

"Did Mr. Clairmont seem hurt?"

"No, not in the least. In fact, he seemed thoroughly indifferent."

"I think it is a perfect shame. She might speak and be friendly with him, since he has changed and is such a noble man."

"Yes, I am of your opinion," said George. "I think she could afford to be friendly with him. Since his father's death, over two years ago, he has not visited a saloon, partaken of wine to the slightest excess, nor gambled once. At Hansell's dinner he scarcely tasted of any of the wines that were served. Do you know, Mym, Clairmont has returned to Lance and Leonard every cent that he ever won from them? He even overpaid them to be sure that he did not owe them."

"O, George, wasn't that noble of him? How could any woman help loving such a

man? Of course he did wrong and, I dare say, caused her much suffering, but now since he has changed and is one of the noblest of men and the greatest of American actors, it seems to me that she would forgive and be very, oh, very proud of him."

"I agree with you, Mym."

"George, does she know about his returning of the money to those men?"

"I do not know whether she does or not."

"Who told you about it?"

"Armour. You know he and Clairmont are the best of friends. Their friendship is not unlike that of Damon and Pythias."

"I believe I will tell Helene when she comes to-night."

"Mym, I would much rather that you let somebody else enlighten her on the subject. She will hear of it sooner or later. Let me conclude my narrative. Where was I? O, yes, I know. She completely ignored him and he, seemingly, did not notice it, yet he allowed his eyes to rest upon her with unspeakable admiration. She was turning away, when her eyes were lifted and encountered his. For a moment he compelled her to look at him, then her eyes drooped and a wave of brilliant color overspread her face and throat. Of course all of us felt slightly embarrassed. To make matters worse, Eustace thought he would plaster up things by making some sort of remark, so he said, 'Mrs. Clairmont, please speak to Clairmont.

It would brighten him up. The fellow has had the blues all day.' At this Clairmont shot a fierce glance at Eustace, who grew red in the face. Helene was disconcerted. She essayed to speak, but turned quickly away. Clairmont flushed deeply, said nothing, and merely moved off. At this moment dinner was announced and we adjourned to the dining-room. Of course the incident placed a damper over everything."

"How could she behave so at Mr. Hansell's rooms?"

"I do not know. I think she utterly loathes Clairmont, and I believe, too, that she is perfectly heartless."

"George, does Mr. Clairmont seem to care anything for her?"

"No; he is simply freezing to her. Several times lately I have enjoyed the pleasure of accompanying him to the Garrick Club. You know the members are privileged to bring friends with them whenever they wish. Not long ago, Clairmont and myself had not been in the reading-room more than ten minutes when Helene and Grace entered. Clairmont spoke to Grace most cordially, merely glanced at Helene and turned away. I think his utter indifference to her hurts her and that is one reason she has no scruples about trying to cut and humiliate him in public. She will deeply regret it some day."

"I think it is exceedingly unwomanly in her. I hope she will refrain from doing anything of the kind here this evening."

"I hope so too, Mym. I consider such behavior very unbecoming in a womanly woman and disgusting beyond expression. Mym, I hope you will not breathe to any one what I have confided to you, because they might hear of it and think we have been discussing them, which we have no right to do."

"I only wish she knew how noble he is."

"If you wish it," said her brother, "you must not speak of it."

"O, no, I won't."

"Mym, promise that you will not."

"I promise, George."

As the day wore away and evening approached, Myriam could not forbear thinking of the unfortunate incident that occurred at Mr. Hansell's dinner and of the sad relations existing between Mr. and Mrs. Clairmont, and she felt that Helene did not deserve much happiness. Was Helene happy? Did she possess that which her heart held most dear, that for which her soul yearned most intently? If she did not possess that object which was so essential to her earthly happiness, that object on which she centered her hopes, her yearnings, and her affections, nay the very depths of her soul—if this object were not hers, then Helene Clairmont was not a happy woman.

Myriam continued to speculate upon her friend's happiness, and she trusted that nothing would happen to mar the pleasure of the evening. Tea was soon served, after which Mr. Chelcy begged Myriam and George to excuse him, as he felt very much fatigued from his afternoon walk, so they permitted him to retire.

It was nearly nine when most of the guests arrived, but the musicians had not yet made an appearance. George was in the drawing-room with his friends, while Myriam, who looked lovely in an evening toilette of cream gauze over lavender silk, was in her room, entertaining Grace, Helene, and a Miss Foster, as they removed their furs and wraps.

Miss Matille Foster was a tall and extremely handsome blonde. She had created no little stir among the "smart set" since she had made her debut into the social realm two years before. The three did not wear evening toilettes, but were attired in their calling gowns. Miss Foster wore an exquisite gown of brown and white. Grace was beautiful in turquoise blue, while Helene was wondrously striking in a rich gown of pearl-gray cloth trimmed in white and gold, with a touch of black. The large picture hat of pearl-gray velvet, with its full, drooping ostrich plumes of the same hue, was worn over the face and was exceedingly becoming.

"Grace," said Myriam, "I want you and Helene to meet two of my friends here this

evening. They are Mr. Brosk and Mr. Weldon. Matille, however, is acquainted with them. You came with one of them, did you not, Matille?"

"Yes," answered Miss Foster, "I came with Mr. Weldon."

"Both of them," continued Myriam rather flippantly, "are good friends of George's and mine and they feel privileged to call as often as they like. They were abroad for over three years and returned only two weeks ago."

"Then, Myriam," laughed Miss Foster, "they could not have called as often as they wished."

"O, Matille," said Myriam, "you know what I mean. George and I knew them a long time before they ever went abroad."

"I knew what you meant. I was only teasing you."

"I forgive you, Matille." Then she continued: "Both Mr. Brosk and Mr. Weldon are very wealthy and are gentlemen of ease. Mr. Brosk is really nice looking. He has gray eyes and wears a vandyke beard."

"I dislike beards thoroughly," said Helene simply.

"You do? I don't," said Myriam. "I think they are really becoming to some people. Mr. Weldon," she went on, "is neither good looking nor bad looking. He is clean-shaven and has very black eyes, which are so tiny and so keen and piercing that they look

like small black beads. His complexion, too, is so dark that it is almost bronze. I dare say he will question you not a little when he meets you. He is very, very inquisitive and he interrogates any and everybody whether he has known them long or even a few minutes. Doubtless he thinks it an easy way to entertain people." They all laughed.

"I dislike inquisitive people," observed Helene indifferently.

"So do I," echoed Grace.

"I quite agree with you," put in Miss Foster.

"Well, I am not especially fond of them," said Myriam. Then she added, laughing, "I should much prefer my husband—that is, if I ever marry, of course—not to be inquisitive. Are you all ready to go down?"

"Yes, quite ready," the three responded at once.

Myriam and Helene led the way, followed by Grace and Miss Foster. When they had descended the staircase and were on the verge of entering the drawing-room, which was separated from the hall by means of portieres, Myriam said in a low voice, "Helene, do you know that Mr. Clairmont is one of the best and noblest of men?"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Helene with sarcastic emphasis. "I am not aware of his goodness."

Myriam was somewhat chagrined at the manner in which Helene spoke. She, how-

ever, continued, "He is one of the noblest and grandest men I know."

"Myriam, what are you definitions of the words goodness and nobility? Do you regard a man who drinks and gambles a good and noble man? If you do, then our ideas of the words are at variance. Do you know what some one ventured to ask me not long ago?"

"No; what?"

"They wanted to know if I were going to connect myself with Mr. Clairmont's company again. That person, furthermore, informed me that they heard there had been a reconciliation and that he and I were soon to be married. Did you ever hear anything so thoroughly nonsensical? Nothing on earth would or could induce me to again become a member of his company. I should retire from the stage first. As for marrying him, I would undergo the pain of a thousand deaths before I should again become his wife. I simply—"

"Hush, Helene, he will hear you," remonstrated Myriam in low, anxious tones.

"I have not the slightest objection. I wish he did know my feelings. I utterly loathe and despise the man, and I would not marry him again under any consideration."

"Helene, do you know what you are saying?"

"Why, certainly I do. You would say the same thing if you had suffered what I did.

You cannot know, Myriam, what it is to have an intoxicated husband coming home in the early hours of the morning," and Helene's face grew cold and hard.

"Helene, he has changed. He has abandoned his old habits and become a different man."

"Do you know for sure that so phenomenal an event has come to pass?"

"Yes, Helene, I do, and you should be more than proud of him," returned Myriam earnestly. She yearned to unfold to Helene the whole story of how Mr. Clairmont returned to Lance and Leonard every cent he had ever won from them and of how, too, he had overpaid them to be sure that he did not owe them. She longed to tell it all, but then she would not violate her promise to her brother, so she remained silent in regard to it.

"Do you know, Helene, I know something that, if I were to disclose it, would compel you to believe me."

"Would it? Suppose you tell it to me."

"Helene," said Grace almost harshly, "I know Reginald has heard every word that you have said and it distresses me so much to know that he has."

"Suppose we go in," suggested Myriam quietly. They parted the portieres and entered. The musicians were seated near the piano and Herr Carlyr was tuning his violin. George introduced Mr. Armour and Mr.

Clairmont to Miss Foster, she having met Gerald several times before, while Myriam presented to Helene and Grace Mr. Brosk and Mr. Weldon. Grace was very friendly to Mr. Clairmont, but Helene completely ignored him. Her cutting him was extremely noticeable to all, but it did not in the least disturb or disconcert him. He, however, did not feel hurt, for it was perfectly immaterial to him whether she recognized him or not; in fact, he treated her with the severest frigidity. As Helene, on moving away, raised her eyes, they encountered Mr. Clairmont's. For a full moment they gazed into each other's eyes, for it seemed some magnetic force in the dark depths compelled the violet ones to meet them. That moment was one of deep embarrassment to Helene and a wave of crimson swept over her cheeks and brow. Her discomfiture was clearly perceived by every one in the room.

Finally all were seated. Mr. Weldon placed his chair beside Helene's, allowed his black beads to scrutinize her face closely, and then begun his interrogation.

"Mrs. Clairmont, are you and Mr. Clairmont related?"

"No."

"I thought that you might be."

"Did you?"

"Yes, I thought you were."

"No, we are not in the slightest."

Mr. Schloss slowly ran his fingers over the keys of the piano to test its action, preparatory to beginning his solo. Helene wondered if the man near her would prove himself so impolite as to continue to ply questions.

"Then your husband was either Mr. Clairmont's brother or cousin?"

Helene longed to be freed from such a man. She wished, too, that the music would begin. After a moment, her answer came in an indifferent tone, "My husband was neither Mr. Clairmont's brother nor cousin."

"You have known him some time, have you not? You were his leading lady over three years ago, when I saw you both in *The Last Days of Pompeii*. Since then I have not had the pleasure of seeing you, as I have been abroad for the last two years and returned only two weeks ago. Do you still play opposite him?"

"No."

"I was in hopes you did, for you and he were the finest combination seen on the American stage. Indeed, while abroad, Brosk and I did not see any combination that surpassed or even equaled you."

"Thank you, Mr. Weldon," said Helene simply.

Would the music ever begin? Why did not Herr Carlyr arrange his music and cease tuning his violin? Stringed instruments were always such a nuisance.

Mr. Weldon sat silent for a moment. Then he asked without any scruple of conscience: "Why did you and Mr. Clairmont not recognize each other a few minutes ago? I noticed that you did not speak."

"Did you?"

"Yes. I assure you it was very noticeable."

"Was it, indeed?"

"I can assure you it was," answered Mr. Weldon, who was determined to probe the matter to the very bottom. "Do you always treat him as you have done this evening?"

"Do you think a gentleman is vested with the privilege of cross-examining a lady about her private affairs, especially if he be a stranger to her?"

At that Spencer Weldon was somewhat disconcerted.

"Mrs. Clairmont," said he quietly, scrutinizing her closely, "I beg your pardon. I have no right to question you. I was thinking of what a noble fellow Clairmont is. Only yesterday a dear friend of Mr. Clairmont and who knows, told me that Mr. Clairmont had not gambled once nor deliberately drunk wine since his father's death over two years ago. This friend also informed me that Mr. Clairmont had returned to Lance and Leonard every cent that he had ever won from them and that he even overpaid them to be sure that he did not owe them."

Was it this, thought Helene, that Miriam Chelcy knew and longed to tell her? Was it this that Myriam meant would convince her of Reginald Clairmont's goodness and nobility? And if it were, must she learn it from a stranger? Why had not Harold or Grace told her? Perhaps Reginald did not wish her to know. Why had not Grace told her? Doubtless Harold had exacted of her a promise to withhold it. Did Gerald know about it too? She would ask when she reached home. Yet, she thought, why should she know? She was not the least interested in him. She did not care for him nor about him. Helene upbraided herself severely for allowing her thoughts to dwell, for even a moment, upon him. She involuntarily glanced at Mr. Clairmont, who was between her and Miss Foster, and who sat very near her. She knew that he had heard her conversation with Mr. Welden, for he had talked little. At that thought a deep crimson overspread her features and she felt a sharp pain at her heart. But then her conscience upbraided her still more sharply for allowing that pain at her heart. Why should his hearing her conversation with Mr. Weldon cause her pain? She cared absolutely nothing for him.

Helene was silent for some time. Then, turning to her companion, she asked quietly, "Mr. Weldon, who was your informant?"

"Is it necessary to divulge names?" he queried, ignoring her question and scrutinizing closely every feature.

"No, it is not necessary," she answered, "but I should esteem it a favor if you would disclose the name."

"Mrs. Clairmont, it was Chelcy. Yesterday he and I were speaking of you and Mr. Clairmont and he told me about his friend returning the money to those men and his overpaying them. It was, indeed, a noble and generous act and anyone who performs such an act is truly a noble man, a man of high honor and trust and a man of whom any one might be proud."

"Yes, it was indeed noble of him," acquiesced Helene quietly.

As she unconsciously raised her eyes they encountered Mr. Clairmont's resting upon her. His gaze was cold, calm, earnest. As she gazed into the face of the man who had once been her husband Helene noted the deep shadows beneath the eyes and the hard lines about the firm mouth, lines not caused by dissipation, but drawn there by untold suffering and hard struggles, struggles to trample and crush forever within him the desire for the old habits and to become a truer and nobler man. And now, as her eyes rested upon that grand, manly figure, and noble countenance, with its fine features creased with lines of intense suffering, struggle and sorrow, Helene saw that Reginald Clairmont

had proved himself to be a man, a man not only of physical strength and courage, but a man of great moral courage as well. She saw, too, that even after she had cut him in public, at dinners, and at the Garrick Club, he held his own nobly and manfully.

Her heart sank as she noted all this, especially as she had never once reproached herself for her attempts to crush and humiliate him. But had she crushed and humiliated him? Though his feelings were injured and he had felt hurt, yet he was not one whit lowered in the eyes of his friends and of the public; but they were proud to claim him as their friend. Two years and a half ago he had been a drunkard and a gambler, but now he was a leader among men. Was Helene Clairmont proud of him? Was she ashamed that he bore his father's name and her name? No, she was not ashamed, but was proud of it, for he had honored that name as it should have been honored.

Yet, though she recognized all this, she did not wish to admit it, and censured herself severely for believing in any of his noble qualities.

As Helene lowered her eyes and as Mr. Clairmont slowly and somewhat wearily passed his hand across his brow, Mr. Schloss began that exquisite musical gem, the overture to "Tannhauser" arranged for the piano. His technique was perfect and his tones and shadings were delightful. For an encore

he rendered with airiness and sweetness Grieg's "Papillon." As he played, one could almost see the butterflies, with their silvery, gossamer wings, dancing, fluttering, and floating amid the golden sunbeams on a June day answering to the description of the one so beautifully defined in "Sir Launfal." The pianist was compelled to respond a third time. Then Herr Carlyr followed with an exquisite violin solo. His technique was masterful and his touch like a beautiful dream. He so hypnotized his violin that it laughed, danced, sang or wept, as he willed it. Ah, what tones were those that he brought forth from that instrument of all instruments, so clear, so round, so full. Among many, many selections rendered were "Berceuse," by Godard, and "Hearts and Flowers," by Tobani.

After Herr Carlyr had enchanted his hearers Mr. Schloss approached Myriam and said, "Now, mademoiselle, will not somebody sing?" and he glanced around the room.

Myriam asked Helene, Mr. Clairmont, and Miss Foster. The latter graciously complied with her request, while Helene and Mr. Clairmont pleaded some excuse and begged to be allowed to listen. Miss Foster's voice was soprano, and though weak, was sweet and pathetic and charmed her hearers. After light refreshments were served, Mr. Schloss and Herr Carlyr enchanted their little audience with more of their delightful music. The

last number was rendered by Mr. Schloss and it was "Berceuse," by Chopin. As his fingers passed over the keys, Mr. Schloss was so absorbed in his music that he closed his eyes and seemed to be wrapped in a dream. After much praising and extending of thanks on the part of the hostess and her friends, the musicians took their leave, begging to be allowed the pleasure of another evening at Miss Chelcy's home.

When they were gone, Myriam said, in pleading tones, "Helene, Matille has been so obliging about singing, now won't you please sing one song?"

"I am sorry, Myriam, but I cannot this evening," replied Helene simply.

"Please, just one," persisted Myriam.

"I am sorry, but I cannot," returned Helene, quietly but firmly.

Myriam then approached and asked Mr. Clairmont.

"Miss Chelcy, I have no one to play my accompaniment."

"Matille will oblige you, I am sure."

"I regret so much that I am unable to accompany you, Mr. Clairmont," said Miss Foster, "but I hurt my wrist not long ago and I have not been able to practice. If it were not for that, I would accommodate you with pleasure."

"Thank you, Miss Foster," said Mr. Clairmont. "It is too bad that you hurt your wrist. I trust that it will soon be well."

"I, too, trust it will."

"Helene," pleaded Myriam, "we do so want to hear Mr. Clairmont sing. Won't you play his accompaniment?"

Helene and Mr. Clairmont looked straight into each other's eyes. There was not a relaxation in either countenance, but both were very cold and impassive. For a full minute they gazed frigidly at each other. Then Helene said proudly, "Myriam; I would rather not."

How queenly, how grandly majestic she was as she stood there! What a magnificent man, too, was Reginald Clairmont, with his broad shoulders, his grandly-poised head, his fine, dark eyes and his kingly bearing! Indeed, he seemed no ordinary man, as he stood there leaning against the piano, with his arms folded on his deep chest. As he quietly gazed upon Helene, Reginald Clairmont seemed a leader among men, a man of greatness, a man that would vindicate himself in the eyes of the world and prove himself to be a man of character, a man of courage, and, above all, a man of high honor. All, as they remained silent, felt proud to call him their friend. Even Helene felt deep remorse for all that she had said and done. She felt her face burning and she turned away so that he and the others might not see it; but he had seen and he knew that it was greatly flushed.

"Helene," urged Myriam, "please be accommodating and accompany him. All of us are so anxious to hear him."

"Indeed we are, Mrs. Clairmont," said Miss Foster.

"Mrs. Clairmont, we insist upon it," rejoined Mr. Brosk.

"Let me add my entreaties," put in Mr. Weldon.

"Miss Chelcy," said Mr. Clairmont in a cold, calm voice, "please do not insist upon Mrs. Clairmont's playing my accompaniment. I will sing with pleasure some other evening."

"Helene, why can't you be obliging?" asked Grace in a worried tone.

As Helene moved toward the piano, Mr. Clairmont, leaning forward and very near her, said with acute sarcasm and in most freezing tones, "Mrs. Clairmont, believe me, I would not have a lady who derides a man in public degrade herself, in the slightest, by playing an accompaniment for him to sing. Indeed, I would much rather forego the pleasure of singing than to have you lowered in the eyes of your friends by accompanying me."

A deep flush passed over Helene's face, and as she raised her eyes they encountered his resting coldly upon her. It seemed that some magnetic or occult power in his compelled her own to meet them. For an instant these two stood with their eyes fixed intently upon each other. Then Helene's drooped and she said quietly, "Mr. Clair-

mont, I will play any song that you select," and she seated herself at the instrument and began turning over some music.

"What shall I sing?" asked Mr. Clairmont, all the while keeping his eyes on Helene. "Shall I sing 'Love's Sorrow'?"

"Yes, do," said Grace, "I think it is beautiful."

"Have you it, Miss Chelcy?"

"Yes," Myriam said, bringing forth the song with several others. Mr. Clairmont placed the music before Helene.

"I would much rather you did not sing it," she said, in a low voice, meeting his eyes for a moment, then letting hers drop.

"Why not?" he asked in equally low tones, keeping his eyes on her and bending toward her. It was the first time, in over two years, that they had spoken to each other, and now it seemed so strange, so very strange, that they should speak.

"Because I—" and she could say no more, for she felt something almost choking her.

"Because what?" he inquired, bending still lower.

"We are waiting, Mr. Clairmont?" said Myriam.

"Do you object to playing it?" he asked. For an answer she softly played the prelude.

Never had Reginald Clairmont sung as he did on that evening. His powerful but magnificent voice filled the room with all its glorious sweetness. As many times as she

had accompanied him during the days of their married life, never had Helene heard him sing with such marvelous expression and with so much beauty and feeling. In some parts of the song, and especially in the chorus, she could scarcely play the notes. So deeply pathetic was his voice that she felt the next moment she would break down completely, but she managed to control her feelings and finish it. His next selection was that beautiful gem "Could I," by Tosti. The last song he rendered was "Farewell," by Schubert.

As Mr. Clairmont was singing the last few lines, Helene stopped playing, buried her face in her hands, and allowed him to finish it alone. Her accompanying him caused her to revert to the time when she had first been married, when she had enjoyed all happiness, when she was the wife of a man who was a member of one of the noblest families and who was one of the greatest of actors. Now they were divorced, never again to be reunited. For over two years they had not spoken, and the estrangement would continue to the end.

Mr. Clairmont rested his eyes on the bowed head. He, too, recalled the days when she had been his wife. He thought how on Sunday evenings she had played for him to sing, and how, too, she had often sung with him. But now she was free and he was free and there could never, never be any more playing and singing together. They were

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divorced and divorced they would ever remain.

Mr. Clairmont's face grew hard and impassive, and with that hardness and impassiveness how strong and masculine were his features! He passed his hand slowly over his forehead and walked to the window at the farther end of the room. The others kept silent, lest they should break upon the thoughts and feelings that stirred the minds and hearts of those two who had suffered the bitterest sorrows and during those sorrows, how they had struggled for happiness! Two years and a half had passed, yet there were those sorrows still—ever hard, bitter, cruel.

Helene remained with her face buried in her hands while Reginald Clairmont, still standing at the window, looked out into the dark night and up at the cold, silent, golden stars glimmering in the blue vault of heaven far away.

CHAPTER X

AT THE GARRICK CLUB

"Miss Grace, what is that you are saying about men preferring women without brains to women with them?" queried Mr. Stuart Hartburn, laughing.

Mr. Stuart Hartburn was a man of good stage presence and enjoyed much dramatic ability. He was not handsome, but he possessed a pleasing countenance, with deep gray eyes that sparkled with intelligence and humor, for he was always narrating some good joke or story, which together with his pleasant manners, rendered him quite a favorite with nearly everybody. It was in his company that Helene was leading woman.

Grace, Mr. Hartburn, and Mr. Clairmont were contentedly seated in the parlors of the Garrick Club. This club was one organized for the pleasure and benefit of the members of the theatrical profession. Women, as well as men, were enrolled as members and enjoyed every right and privilege. The Garrick Club had its parlors, dining-room, smoking-room, library, and reading-room, all of which were furnished most elegantly and elaborately and were equipped with every modern

convenience. It was there that the actors, when not at the theatres, attending rehearsals, transacting business, conversing with their managers or being interviewed by the newspaper reporters, spent their leisure moments. This club was an ideal, and truly the actors' club.

Harold Armour entered just as Mr. Hartburn finished speaking. Grace had come to the club with the expectation of finding Helene; but instead, she found only Mr. Hartburn and Mr. Clairmont. She inquired of them if they had seen her sister, but they informed her that they had not. Harold, Grace, and Mr. Hartburn were seated in a group engaged in conversation, while Reginald stood dreamily gazing into the streets below.

"It is true, Mr. Hartburn," asserted Grace earnestly, "that, ninety-nine times out of one hundred, men prefer women of beauty without brains to women of beauty with them. They hate cleverness and superiority in a woman. All they want is beauty, simply the features, even barring expression. They do not want that which is intelligent and soulful, but desire simply pretty features. Men never like to see a woman cleverer than they are. They hate great intelligence in a woman."

"Now, Miss Grace, I think you misjudge our sex. Men are always charmed to converse with a clever woman and they admire

rather than hate cleverness. It is one of the qualities few women possess and which most men admire. Don't they, Armour?"

"Yes, that they do," replied Harold.

"But," continued Grace, "while they may admire cleverness and all that, they rarely, if ever, marry a clever woman.

"Clairmont," called Mr. Hartburn, "I wish you would come here and listen to Miss Grace."

"What is it, Hartburn?" inquired Mr. Clairmont, joining the group.

"What do you think she says?"

"I can't imagine."

"Well, she argues that, ninety-nine times out of one hundred, men prefer women of beauty without brains to women of beauty with them; that they hate cleverness and great intelligence in the fair sex, and that they dislike to acknowledge a woman's superiority. Did you ever hear anything like it? Why, I insist that we admire all that in the gentler sex; that we are ever charmed to converse with such women, and—"

"If men do admire it all, Reginald," said Grace, interrupting Mr. Hartburn, "you know they rarely, if ever, marry such a woman."

"I do not agree with you, Grace."

"You do not?"

"No, I do not. If men admired cleverness, they would marry clever women."

"There, Reginald, I do not agree with you," said Grace laughing.

"Clairmont, I echo your sentiments," laughed Mr. Hartburn. "Miss Grace, the victory is ours."

"Hartburn and I both agree with you, Clairmont," joined in Harold.

"Well," said Grace in earnest tones, "I wish you could all hear what Helene says about it."

"I wish we could have that pleasure," observed Mr. Hartburn. "Is she your authority on such subjects?"

"No, but I think her opinions about most things are worth a great deal."

"I have no doubt that they are. Mrs. Clairmont is indeed a very clever and strong-minded woman," said Mr. Hartburn.

"Yes, indeed she is," assented Harold.

At this point in the conversation the door was quietly opened and Helene Clairmont entered. As she approached the four, they could not but admire her. There was something of the dramatic, something magnificently grand about this woman which no other woman possessed.

Helene drew near, shook hands with Mr. Hartburn and Harold, but calmly ignored Mr. Clairmont. When she had seated herself, his eyes met hers frigidly and scornfully. Then he rose.

"Where are you going Clairmont?"

"As I have several manuscripts to look over, I think I might as well do it now."

"I am extremely sorry that you enjoy looking over manuscripts more than you do our company."

"It is not that at all, Hartburn. I have a perfect distaste for such work at certain times, but I feel that it is important and must be done. I am, indeed, loth to take my departure."

"Mr. Clairmont, I beg you not to withdraw on my account. I do not wish to be the cause of your going and of depriving these gentlemen of the pleasure of your company," said Helene coldly and with quiet dignity.

"Mrs. Clairmont, my dear madam, permit me to assure you that you are not the occasion of my departure. I beg, madam, that you will not allow yourself to entertain such an idea, even for a moment," returned Mr. Clairmont, with a calm, kingly bearing and in the most polite but freezing tones.

There was an embarrassing silence.

"Clairmont," said Mr. Hartburn, "we want you so much. If you go, we shall feel very much hurt."

"Indeed we shall," assented Grace.

"Clairmont, we are just not going to let you leave us," said Harold firmly.

"It is very kind of you to really want me," averred Mr. Clairmont earnestly. He glanced coldly at Helene, but she remained rigidly

silent. After much pressing, he was induced to resume his seat.

"Mrs. Clairmont," said Mr. Hartburn smiling, "do you know we were talking about you just before you entered."

"Were you? What were you saying about me? I hope it wasn't anything so very dreadful."

"It was something pleasant, I assure you. we could not say anything otherwise."

"Thank you, Mr. Hartburn."

"Miss Grace said we ought to hear your opinions about men preferring women of beauty without brains to women of beauty with them. She said your opinions on such subjects were worth a great deal. Armour, Clairmont, and myself were engaged in a most heated argument with her when you came in."

"Were you? Well, do you know, I think Grace is quite right about it."

"Do you really think so?"

"Yes, I really do. Men do prefer beauty devoid of intelligence to beauty combined with it. In other words, they prefer, when it approaches actual beauty, the objective to the subjective."

"I think you err there, Mrs. Clairmont," said Mr. Hartburn. "In fact, I think you have reversed it. They prefer the subjective to the objective."

"O, no, Mr. Hartburn," returned Mrs. Clairmont. "Doesn't a man choose merely

a pretty face in preference to a homely woman of intelligence and amiability, who would make him a far better wife of the two? A homely woman with a mind and a soul is far preferable to the woman with simply a pretty face. It has been my observation that men invariably prefer mere beauty to mind, heart, and soul. You know that the diamond and the ruby and the most priceless gems are imbedded in the cold, dark, hideous recesses of the earth. You remember what the poet says:

'Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear.'

They, perhaps, possess some of the most admirable qualities, yet a man will select the woman with the pretty face. A man dislikes, beyond measure, to recognize a woman's superiority to himself, or to see her win greater laurels than he. Selfish creatures that they are, they want it all and would, if they could debar woman completely. That is the cause of so much professional jealousy, of ruptures, and so many divorces among our stage people. Beautiful women are nearly always selfish and indifferent to the feelings of others. It is beauty that makes them so."

"Your theory does not always hold good," said Mr. Hartburn.

"No, not always, for there are exceptions to the rule, but as a general thing it does," answered Mrs. Clairmont. "Men never like

to acknowledge their own weaknesses, but they do like to extol their own virtues. Shakespeare says men are fickle and I say they are very deceptive, yet you would contend that they are neither."

"And they are not. It is women who are fickle and deceptive, uncertain, coy, and hard to please. But, Mrs. Clairmont," said Mr. Hartburn smiling, "I will not disparage the fair sex. I think they are the sweetest of all God's creatures."

"I echo your sentiments, Hartburn," asserted Harold firmly.

"I do also," added Mr. Clairmont.

"I knew Helene was right about it all," smiled Grace proudly.

"Then, Miss Grace," laughed Mr. Hartburn, "do you think Armour loves you solely for your beauty and nothing else? If I were you, and thought that, I certainly should not feel complimented."

Grace blushed violently, but said proudly, "Harold is not like most men, I am glad to say."

"Miss Grace, I beg your pardon," said Mr. Hartburn apologetically. "I was only trying to tease you."

"Miss Grace knows well enough that every one admires her for what she is," affirmed Harold.

"Of course everybody does," assented Mr. Clairmont.

At this juncture the porter entered and announced, "Mrs. Clairmont, some one wishes to speak to you."

"Who is it, Webster?"

"Some man said he wanted to speak to you just a moment and asked me not to tell his name."

Helene hesitated a moment, and then said indifferently, "You may show him in here, Webster."

"Mrs. Clairmont," explained the porter, "the man said he would see you only a moment, he would be glad if you would step into the hall."

"I will tell you what to do," remarked Mr. Hartburn. "As it is the hour for dinner, we will adjourn to the dining-room, and you can receive your friend here."

All arose, and Helene turned to the man awaiting her instructions, "Webster, please inform him that I shall be there shortly."

"Yes, Mrs. Clairmont," and he withdrew.

"Helene, it is better that you see him here," announced Harold.

"I think so, too," asserted Grace.

"As he desires a moment's audience, it is totally unnecessary," returned Helene, with perfect indifference.

"Mrs. Clairmont," said Mr. Hartburn, "it is my wish that you four dine with me this evening. I shall take no excuse."

"Thank you, Mr. Hartburn," answered Helene. "I accept your kind invitation with

pleasure. You may await me in the dining-room, as I shall be there after a moment."

They accordingly retired to the dining-room, where they seated themselves at an almost oblong table.

Helene, meanwhile, entered the hall, and what was her amazement and indignation when she beheld the man who had requested a moment's audience! What could this man want with her? Why had he come and asked to speak to her? Why had he demanded it, she was unable to fathom. She knew that he cherished a most violent hatred for Mr. Clairmont and she knew, too, that he could not endure her, because she had looked upon his suit with disfavor and rejected him before her marriage to Mr. Clairmont. Since her divorce, he had renewed his attentions and sought to reinstate that acquaintance which once existed between them, but his overtures had been met with cold, proud indifference. Her coldness had only embittered him the more, so that he utterly loathed Mr. Clairmont and herself.

For a moment Helene hesitated. He advanced a step nearer. His face was crimson and bloated, his eyes were bloodshot and glaring and his speech was thick and drawling. He summoned all his efforts to steady himself. As one so thoroughly repulsive approached her, Helene involuntarily shuddered and passed her hand over her forehead for

a moment, after which she seemed calm and indifferent.

"Mrs. Clair-er-mont," began the man thickly, "I want to—to see—er you a—a—moment."

The man was so beastly drunk that he could scarcely stand or exert any control over himself. After a moment he continued; "I have tried—to—to see you for—for the past sev—several days."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Lance?" inquired Helene coldly. Since she had granted his request, she was determined to brave it out.

"Mrs. Clair—Clairmont," he jerked out, "I want—to—to know—er—when I may—call to—see—you?"

"Really, Mr. Lance," explained Helene calmly, "I am very busy these days and I regret that I am unable to arrange with you any definite date to call."

"May—er—I call Sunday e—evening?"

"I am sorry, but I have an engagement for that evening."

"Then er—can't—you—you give m—me some idea when er—you—you can—see—me?" Lance persisted with great effort.

"No, Mr. Lance, I am sorry, but I cannot," Helene returned simply.

"Then er—you do—do not want to—to see—me?" he queried angrily.

"Mr. Lance, I beg you will not allow yourself to entertain any such idea," said Helene quietly.

The intoxicated man seemed to grow more savage. His eyes stared vacantly and he staggered and almost fell, but braced himself against the wall. After a little, he somewhat recovered himself. "Then er—why er—er will you not see—me?" he demanded, almost beside himself with rage and drawing very near to her.

Helene recoiled, and then answered in a calm, cold voice, "Mr. Lance, I never receive a man in my home who worships at the shrine of Bacchus, who is always under the influence of strong drink."

"What,—er you tell—me th—that you—you—will—not—re—receive—me?" he almost yelled. "You—you who—are—are—an a-c-tress; you—you who—should not be—be—called a—a l-a-dy! Ha, wom—an, you are—are no—nobody. You,—er—wo-man,—will—er—er—see—a-n-ybody," he continued, roughly seizing her hands.

"Coward, release my hands!" said Helene angrily, and growing very pale. She made a violent attempt to free herself and succeeded. "Wretch! coward! How dare you insult me, a woman?" she demanded scornfully and turned away.

"Ha, woman,—you—you—th—think you are—out of er—my grasp, but—" and he again seized her by the hands. "Come,—my

—my dear, we er—er will dine to—gether and then I—I—will escort you—you to the—the theatre af—terwards.”

He placed one arm about her and drew her along several steps, she all the time making violent efforts to extricate herself; but his arm and grasp grew tighter and tighter, until she felt as if she were in a vise.

“Come—a—along,—my—my young woman, and we—we—will have—a—a nice dinner. Don’t—both—er a—about it, I er—will escort you—to—to the theater afterwards.”

Helene felt weak and faint; indeed, she felt so much so that she was unable to call for help. Never before in all her life had she so longed for some one. She felt as if she would almost die.

“Who wants your escort, you dastardly wretch, you drunken beast?” demanded Mr. Clairmont, as he dealt Lance a blow which forced him to relax his hold on Helene, and which hurled him heavily to the floor. “Infamous wretch!” exclaimed Mr. Clairmont in rage and scorn. “Webster, have this drunken beast removed. His vile presence pollutes the very atmosphere.”

Webster proceeded to remove Lance, who lay in a heap upon the floor, badly stunned from the blow and the fall.

Helene, however, stood leaning against the wall. Her eyes were closed and she was very white and seized with a violent agitation. For a moment she stood thus. Then

she staggered and would have fallen to the floor, had not Mr. Clairmont caught her. He passed his arm about her and drew her into the parlors, which as it was the hour for dinner, were free of guests. The gaslight shed its soft, mellow rays down upon them as they stood in the center of the room. Helene had not fainted, but she was very much agitated, so much so that Mr. Clairmont supported her and her head drooped against his shoulder. As he held her in his arms, he looked down into the beautiful white face and thought of the time when she had promised to be his and when she had been his. He thought of those days when they had begun life together, but now she was lost to him forever, now they were apart and ever to remain so.

It did seem so sweet and still to Helene as she felt his protecting arms about her and as, with eyes closed, she rested her head against his shoulder. She, too, thought of those days when they had loved, when she had been his wife, when she had at first been so happy and they had played and sung together. For over two years they had not spoken, and many times she had derided him in public, and now, after all that, he was aiding and protecting her. As she felt his strong arms about her, she resolved that if they never recognized each other again as long as they lived, she would never again treat him with cold indifference in

public nor speak ill of him to any one. Helene knew that Reginald Clairmont had changed; that he was a better and nobler man; that he utterly loathed his old habits and his past life, and that he honored not dishonored his father's noble name.

For several minutes she stood within the protecting arms of a man whom any one would be proud to claim as a friend, nay even as an acquaintance; whom America was proud to honor and acknowledge as her own, and to whom all the great world paid homage. Helene drew herself gently away from him and supported herself against a chair. At length she raised her great violet eyes to the noble, kingly face of the man who stood before her.

"Mr. Clairmont, how can I ever thank or repay you for what you have done?" said Helene in a low, trembling voice.

"Mrs. Clairmont, I did what was my duty, what any man, who was not a beast, would have done. I do not deserve to be thanked or repaid, for I did that which was plainly my duty and nothing more," returned Mr. Clairmont.

In the sweet moments of stillness that passed the bright lights of the room continued to shed their pure, mellow rays upon them, as if blessing them now, if they had not been blessed in the past, and blessing them for the future.

"Even if you did do what was your duty," resumed Helene, slightly agitated, "I must in some poor way thank you. Do you not know that when a man does his duty, he should at least be thanked if not compensated for it?"

"But in this case it is not necessary," replied Mr. Clairmont almost bitterly. There was a short silence between them. Then he offered to escort her to the dining-room, where they partook lightly of dinner with the rest of their party, after which they made ready for their respective theatres.

Many times, following her terrible encounter with Lance at the Garrick Club, Helene was accosted and roughly insulted by him. Late one afternoon, about a month after the incident at the club, Helene had boarded a cable car and was on her way home from a matinee performance. She felt tired and worn from the work of the afternoon and she knew that she must have some rest before playing again that evening. Her encounters with Lance had greatly worried her and were sadly telling upon her.

She had traveled several blocks when Lance entered the car and seated himself beside her. As usual, he was very drunk, and chuckled to himself as he glanced at her from time to time. She searched the car in the hope of discovering some one to whom she could appeal for protection, but she searched in vain. Lance saw the expression of lost

hope that crossed her features and he gave another chuckle.

"You will come with me now, my—my young queen," he whispered in insulting tones.

Helene did not reply. She did not wish to lower herself by returning an answer. Again she scrutinized the passengers as they passed in and out of the car, but she recognized no one. As she neared her home, a feeling of the most intense dread pervaded her soul. She felt that, on alighting, this man would not hesitate to insult her and she would have no one to protect her. The car was so crowded that many held to the leather straps above them for support. For the third time Helene searched the faces about her, and as she noted who it was that stood clinging to the strap in front of her and who was almost pushed against her, a soft, delicate flush tinged her cheek and a thrill of exquisite joy possessed her.

As her eyes encountered those of the man whom she had reviled in public, and who had, only a short time before, rescued her from the audacious and villainous insults of the infamous wretch sitting beside her, a great pain shot through her to her very soul. Should she speak to him now? Should she recognize him, merely bow to him in token of her very deep gratitude for his kindness to her? Helene's eyes drooped and she did not speak. She wondered why he was on the

car and whom he was going to see. He released the strap and moved away. She wondered if he were going to leave her alone with Lance, a man who was nothing more than a brute, to cruelly insult her. She thought that, after he had once interposed in her behalf, he would not now abandon her to the mercies of such a man.

Mr. Clairmont once more grasped the leather strap he had released, and then looked down at Helene, who met his earnest gaze with a sweet, calm trustfulness in her deep violet eyes. She yearned to say something, but her lips seemed sealed. The moments passed. She glanced at Lance, whose features were more crimson and savage than ever. As the car stopped and she was threading her way out, she was forced against Mr. Clairmont, who was immediately in front of her. Finally she alighted and looked about her in the hope of ascertaining if Mr. Clairmont was near; but he was not to be seen anywhere. She, not perceiving him, crossed the street to the corner and proceeded to wend her way to her home, which happily was only a few doors distant. She was feeling greatly relieved that Lance had not followed her, and, too, she was thinking of Reginald, of how fortunate it was for her that he had been in the car and of how ungrateful it had seemed of her not to speak to him; indeed she was thinking of all this, when some one roughly seized her by the arm

and a hoarse voice hissed in her ear: "Now you will come with me, my young queen. You need not fear and you need not attempt to escape, for if you do there might result something unpleasant for both of us."

"Coward, release me!" said Helene, with intense scorn.

"Woman—refuse; it is my pleasure that we dine together," replied Lance gruffly, tightening his grasp on her arm. Helene was very pale and weak, but she summoned every effort to sustain herself. Most bitter loathing fired her dark eyes. It was getting late and there was no one in sight.

"Wretch, coward that you are, I command you to release me or I will call for help," said Helene with extreme contempt.

"Wretch, coward, you denominate me?" he cried angrily. "Well, woman, whether I am or not, you shall dine with me this evening," and he attempted to drag her.

It was almost dark now, and the electric lights had been lighted. Helene felt that she could do nothing, that she was in this man's power and utterly helpless. She longed so to cry out, but her lips remained compressed and refused to breathe forth a sound.

"You shall come with me," hissed Lance.

"Who says she will, you infernal wretch?" demanded Mr. Clairmont angrily, very near them.

"I do; I say so," returned Lance, facing Reginald, and preparing to strike.

"Lance," said Reginald, white with anger, "we will defer this difficulty until to-morrow and not engage in so disgraceful an affair in the presence of a lady."

"Ha, Helene Clairmont is no lady," growled Lance. "She is nobody and—"

Mr. Clairmont could endure no more. "Helene," he said almost fiercely, "go in and let me have it out with this beast."

It was the first time since the meeting after their divorce that he had called her "Helene" or even addressed her unnecessarily. His calling her Helene was done unconsciously, but nevertheless it occasioned an exquisitely sweet thrill that electrified her whole being. She was very white and seemed transfixed, but after a moment she said, "Mr. Clairmont, I cannot leave you here alone to cope with this man."

"It is my wish and you must," he returned, almost seizing her by the hand and leading her away.

"I firmly refuse to obey you and go in," she said proudly.

"Won't you do it, if I wish it?" he asked in pleading tones.

"No, I shall remain here," she answered as proudly as before.

He did not insist, for he saw it was useless. He merely bit his under lip and then returned to Lance, who, something of a coward, awaited his antagonist with intense trepidation. Though calm, Mr. Clairmont was white with

rage. It deeply incensed him to know what cruel insults Lance had hurled at the woman who was not far distant.

"Black wretch and infernal beast, you shall suffer for your insolence!" cried Mr. Clairmont fiercely, as, with all his strength, he dealt Lance a blow that hurled him to the pavement. The drunken man did not have the power to resist such force, but fell and lay stunned in a heap upon the sidewalk. The poor wretch had not forgotten the reward he had received at the Garrick Club.

"Beast! Coward! I have a mind to kill you," exclaimed Mr. Clairmont hoarse with anger.

Lance did not attempt to resent, nor even reply, for he was too much dazed to speak. He lay there making no effort to move, and glaring up at the stars which now illumined the dome of heaven. Mr. Clairmont waited a few moments. He longed to use strong language, but there was Helene not far away from him, so desisted.

"Infernal scoundrel, if ever again you accost Mrs. Clairmont, or even dare to speak to her, I will kill you."

Receiving no reply, Reginald rewarded Lance with a kick, as if he had been nothing more than a beast, and turned away. He walked to where Helene stood, pale and agitated, and led her gently up a few steps and into the house.

These two, Helene and Reginald, who had been so long hostile to each other and who were now alone in the drawing-room of the Kroker home, cared not what became of Lance, who was at that moment on his way to the police station. They were occupied with thoughts of themselves, silent thoughts that were too deep for tears; thoughts of the past, present, and perhaps of the future. A long time they stood silent, these two who had never acknowledged each other's acquaintance even once in over two years. Reginald refused to break the silence because he felt that it was left with the woman before him to recognize and speak to him. When he had addressed her as Helene a few moments ago he had done so unconsciously.

Now they looked straight into each other's eyes, eyes that told of feelings too intense to be expressed, and each read that all animosity and all unfriendliness were buried forever between them. A wave of delicate color passed over Helene's face as her eyes met those of the man whom she had once loved, afterwards despised, and now—well, let that pass unsaid. The deep violet depths met the fine dark ones and then the violet ones drooped and their owner became quite pale again. After a moment she said, "Mr. Clairmont, you have been too kind to me. Twice you have saved me from the brutality of that man. For the last month he has pursued me on every side to cruelly insult me but you

have, for the second time, rescued me from his insolence."

Helene buried her face in her hands. She was so agitated that Mr. Clairmont was forced to pass his arm about her to prevent her from falling. Then he led her to a chair, while he himself remained standing, waiting for her to recover her composure.

He noted that the apartment was the same as when he had first known Helene four years before, and now as he stood in the home in which she had lived and in which she still lived, an exultant thrill electrified his whole being. He looked down at Helene, who was half reclining in a chair with her face buried in her hands, and thought of all that had passed between them.

As he stood looking down at her, Helene raised her head and encountered his deep, earnest gaze. She did not withdraw her eyes from his. There was a moment of hesitation, then Helene, still looking at the man a few feet in front of her, rose to her full height and, in all her proud and queenly beauty, went slowly up to him. He stood motionless, with face impassive and folded arms. Her voice trembled with deep emotion as she said: "How can I tell you how much I feel, how much I owe to you, and what I would do for you if I could? Let me tell you that I owe to you, perhaps, my life; and let me say, too, that I thank you from the very depths of my soul."

"Mrs. Clairmont, it is not necessary for you to thank me or tell me what you owe to me. Indeed, you are in debt to me for nothing. I did only my duty. I did that which any gentleman would have done. Do not, I beg you, thank me, for I deserve no thanks. I insist that you do not allow yourself to worry over what has happened this evening, for it is all right now. Doubtless, by this time, Lance has been escorted to the police station. I shall finish with him yet."

"I am so afraid he will attack you unawares," said Helene anxiously, looking up into Mr. Clairmont's face.

A faint smile irradiated his noble features, and there was a quiet gentleness in his voice as he answered, "You must not worry over such little trifles. Now I must say good-bye, for it is getting late."

"Won't you dine with us?"

"It is very kind of you to ask me, but I am very sorry that I shall have to forego that pleasure this evening," he said, extending his hand and taking hers which she held out to him. He pressed her fingers firmly and warmly.

"Let me insist," Helene said earnestly.

"I regret it deeply, but I must decline your invitation. Really, if some other time you will remember me, I assure you that I shall be most happy to accept."

Helene looked up into his noble face and, in a low voice, trembling with emotion, said,

"Mr. Clairmont, I shall never forget your kindness to me and how you aided me this evening and at the Garrick Club."

He did not reply, but only touched his lips to the slender white hand he held. Then they parted.

CHAPTER XI

THE GREAT QUEEN

O Dramana, thou who art so beautiful and so divine, why art thou in prison!

In the magnificent parlors of the Garrick Club were assembled the members of the Clairmont Company. Helene and Mr. Hartburn, too, were there. The assembling of Mr. Clairmont's company was not for a rehearsal, for if there were to be one, they would have repaired to the Clairmont Theatre, but there was to be a lecture, or rather talk, in the parlors of the club this evening and they had gathered there to enjoy it. All the members of the theatrical profession were invited to be present. It was not exactly a lecture that Mr. Clairmont had intended to deliver, but a sort of talk or discourse upon a subject that lay nearest to his heart, a subject that pertained to the stage, drama, and the theatrical world. It was a subject in which, for many, many years, he had been interested. Indeed, since his entrance into the profession and even before that time, Mr. Clairmont had thought about it, and he felt, too, that the entire theatrical world should and ought to be interested in it.

This evening, the parlors of the Garrick Club were crowded to their utmost with eager listeners who were desirous of hearing Reginald Clairmont speak on his chosen theme, "Dramana in Prison." All present were extremely anxious to hear what the speaker had to say in regard to it.

Mr. Clairmont ascended a small improvised platform. He was accompanied by his devoted friend, Harold Armour, who introduced him.

"Dear Friends, allow me to introduce to you Mr. Reginald Clairmont, who is a grand man; grand in his own way, and whom the world recognizes as one of her grandest actors."

There was loud applause. Mr. Clairmont then rose and came forward. He was greeted with acclamations which lasted for some time and then, finally, subsided to a deep, almost terrifying silence. As Reginald Clairmont stood there in a moment's hesitation, the soft yellow light emitted by the gas jets seemed to throw a tender halo about his noble figure and his finely-chiseled features. When he began to speak, his voice was low, deep and calm.

"Ladies and Gentlemen: I do not propose to deliver a lecture or discourse this evening, but it is my wish to talk to you in a simple and impromptu way on a subject that has, for many years, interested me most deeply. I trust that you will not be severely critical, as

I have made no preparations whatever. I shall, however, deal with my subject most simply. Let me reiterate that this subject has always interested me most deeply. It has claimed almost my entire attention and, indeed, it has penetrated to the very depths of my soul. Dramana in Prison is a theme in which, I trust, most, if not all of you, will be interested and that you, too, will espouse its cause most earnestly.

"Dramana in Prison pertains to the stage, the drama, and all that is in the slightest degree connected with the theatrical world. We all know that, for the last few years, the stage, instead of rising to a very high pinnacle, has sunk into a rapid decadence. Why is it that so many members of this profession produce plays that are indecent, horrible, vulgar and degrading, and oftentimes scarcely remain in the bounds? Why do they do it? Their answer is that the public demands and craves such plays and that in order to make a success they must do what suits the masses. But I say that the people do not want them, people, I mean who are refined and cultivated. It is they who can appreciate art and who abhor all that which is coarse and vulgar. That the people demand such plays is monstrously absurd. It is the reason many managers and actors plead as an excuse for presenting them, but they do it because they falsely imagine that the receipts will be a great deal heavier. Who would want the

money if it be so illy gotten. If the public demand that which is unrefined, then why not elevate its taste instead of degrading it? If the people's minds have reached such a low ebb, it is pitiable and the fact should be deeply deplored.

"Why not elevate the stage and the drama instead of defiling it until it is almost, nay is, groveling in the dirt? Anything coarse is not in the slightest degree true art. Unseemly productions are most heinous insults to what is known as true art. Dramatic art is one of the four great arts and it is, perhaps, not even excepting music, the greatest of them all. Art itself is grand, beautiful, and divine and it does not disgust and contaminate, for it can not; but it speaks and tells only of that which is good, pure, and beautiful. It is as utterly impossible for art to speak of or even intimate anything that is vulgar as it is for God's own glorious, golden stars to extinguish their own brilliant light; for it is divine, and that which is of God can tell alone of that which is beautiful and divine. If it do speak of that which is evil, then it is not art, not God's, and no longer divine, but is of Satan, who generates all wickedness.

"Some one has said that acting is not art. Ah, my friends, all acting is not. If gesticulation and articulation constitute acting, then all acting is not art. But gesticulation and articulation, merely, are not all. In the fine interpretation of a character there is some-

thing more than these two; there is something inexpressible, something intangible in that acting that is known as true art. Is vaudeville an art? No, for it is oftentimes too low and vulgar, and that which is low and commonplace is not and cannot be regarded as such. No matter how high a standard that branch of acting may attain, it can never be esteemed as art. Vaudeville is to the grand dramatic art what the poor writings of a mere amateur are to the exquisite word paintings of John Ruskin; what the miserable attempts of an obscure and lonely artist, who occupies his studio in a dusty and miserable garret, are to those priceless gems of Raphael, Michael Angelo, and Rembrandt; or what some of the inferior compositions of to-day are to those exquisite preludes of Chopin, grand productions of Wagner, and those soulful symphonies of Beethoven.

"If we should be lingering on the shore of a placid lake which, bordered with willows and wild flowers, gleamed with soft, opalescent hues as it lay dreaming in the arms of the sunbeams, and we should spy two white lilies, one with its head groveling in the dirt and besmearing its face with the slime and filth, the other, lifting its beautiful white face and always looking up toward the throne of God to drink in the rain, to smile at the little sunbeams and, finally, to be kissed by the pearly dewdrops, the happy tears of Nature, which of the two lilies should we think the

most beautiful? The one, you will answer, that is always lifting its face to the stars. We could not think the other one lovely. It would only repulse us and we should abruptly turn away from it, despising, yet pitying it. So it is with vaudeville and coarse productions as compared with grand dramatic art, that art which quickens the mind and heart, elevates the soul and inspires within us a love for the good, the true and the beautiful.

"Then, if true dramatic art does all this, is asked, why is it that so much vice is connected with the stage? It is because so many actors and managers do not appreciate and comprehend the full meaning and motive of art, and if some do they would rather ignore its voice to court fame or increase the family coffers. Many work for fame or for a livelihood, but do not labor for the sweet pleasure there is in art nor because of the deep and unflinching love and reverence they bear it. If actors did work for the deep love of it, and if they revered and regarded it as a divine gift, and were thoroughly impressed with its divinity, they would not insult and disgrace art, nor would they disgrace themselves by indulging in vice. Some people utterly lack love, reverence, and deep appreciation of true art and are perfectly indifferent how they degrade and insult it. They are too often indifferent how they disgrace themselves. If an actor debases himself, he likewise debases and insults art, for art should be a part of his

being, and should be held and esteemed as something ineffably dear and sacred to him.

"If a beautiful play be enacted and the public know that those who present it are coarse and immoral, many will come away disgusted with the play and its enterprise. Then, again, if that same beautiful drama be presented by men and women who are good, have noble ideas and aspirations, and who appreciate fully the meaning and mission of art, all will depart with the happy verdict that the entire production was a gem of art and it would be heralded as a success of the season.

"It is because the stage is associated with so much vice that respectable people disapprove so strenuously of their sons and daughters entering the theatrical profession. Why cannot actors conduct themselves as ladies and gentlemen? Why cannot they preserve their honor and not disgrace themselves in their own eyes and in the eyes of the world? Why not produce plays that are refined, where the costume, the plot, and the language are chaste and elegant and will elevate and not degrade those who witness it? Managers and actors could, if they would, uplift instead of debauching the taste, mind, and heart of the public. The theatrical world need exclude only those who would, in the slightest degree, be an insult to art and who would degrade this noble profession and enroll as members those who are refined and cultured and who possess unsullied reputations. If

this were done, the stage would be regarded as one of the noblest of all professions, a high standard of art would be established and maintained, and art itself would not be insulted and trampled in the dust, but would be loved for its own sake and esteemed as a true gift from God."

For a moment Mr. Clairmont ceased speaking. His face was flushed and a deep, earnest, almost despairing expression lurked in his fine dark eyes as they wandered over the room. Indeed, as the soft light shone upon him, Reginald Clairmont seemed as a king come to redeem his profession and all the members of that profession from their sin and vice, to elevate them in the eyes of the people of refinement—to raise art to a high standard and to uphold it there in all its purity, sacredness and divine beauty. He extended his hands a moment as if appealing to his listeners. Then he continued in a voice that was low, sweet and persuasive:

"Though we have the muses of comedy and tragedy, yet in my own mind I have created a goddess of the stage, the drama, and all that is in any way dramatic, and I have called her Dramana. She is fair and beautiful and her soul is as pure and immaculate as the tiny white clouds that float in an azure sky, and she is our great queen of all the arts. Yet this Dramana is in prison, a prison darker and more dismal, perhaps, than the once lonely castle of Chillon. So long as the ac-

tors disgrace the stage by persisting in their vices, and coarse and indecent plays continue to be produced, just so long will Dramana remain in prison. Oh, Dramana, our queen of all the grand arts, our goddess of the dramatic art! how long must thou remain imprisoned in thy gloomy cell where the very atmosphere is close and foul with strong drink, where the language is coarse and unseemly, the costume indecent, and where thy jailers, who are many, are devoid of honor, the love of the true and the beautiful and, above all, of respect and reverence for divine laws? Those who would rescue thee are few, but those who would guard and forever keep thee in prison are many and they will not let thee free. Oh, Dramana, I will, God helping me, do my best toward liberating thee!"

As Mr. Clairmont uttered the last few words his voice seemed as a low, sweet melody, which grew fainter and fainter and then softly died away. When he ceased there was a deep hush, and all gazed at the speaker in silent admiration. Then applause burst forth with clamor and fury, as if people were on the verge of madness. The ovation lasted for some time and then all subsided to a hush as still as the one before. Mr. Clairmont was pale now, and the halo of light still illumined his noble features as his fine, dark figure stood silhouetted against the rays of bright light afforded by the gas jets.

"Dear friends," he began in deep, earnest tones, almost akin to sadness, "I thank you and my heart goes out to you for this generous ovation which you have tendered me this evening. Let me say, dear friends, in conclusion, that I am not a theorist, sentimentalist, nor transcendentalist, and that I do not desire to pose as such. I do not wish to herald or maintain a sort of transcendentalism, for this is an age of extreme practicality and not an age of idealism and idealists. What the public demands is not so much idealism as realism—realism not presented in its lowest, meanest, and most debased phases, but realism portrayed in its cleanest, purest, and most beautiful garb. Dramatic art is, I repeat, the greatest of the four divine arts. I regard it above music, for it can be understood and appreciated by the masses, while a sweet, simple prelude of Chopin or a grand symphony of Beethoven can be understood and appreciated only by a few.

"Dear friends, let me not appeal to you in vain. Let us elevate ourselves. Let us lift the stage from out of the filth and the dirt where it has been trampled, and let us raise it to a high pinnacle where it cannot be reviled nor sullied. Oh, my friends, let us liberate Dramana, our spotless and beautiful queen of the dramatic art, the grandest of all the arts! Let us free her who, with aching heart and drooping head, is imprisoned within a dark and dismal cell where the atmos-

phere is impregnated with foul odors and the voices of the jailers are harsh and stentorian. Let us free her and place her upon a throne mantled in the pure white, gossamer clouds of the morning and place a crown of laurel about her clear, white brow. There, at her feet, no one will dare to insult, but will kneel and worship; she will not be imprisoned and trampled in the dust, but will be revered and lifted to God's stars and God's own will be loved, honored, and revered as His own."

Again there was that deep, still hush after Mr. Clairmont had finished speaking, and again there was that tumultuous applause as before. Reginald Clairmont descended from the platform, and after being besieged and congratulated by his many friends, drew himself away from them all and joined a quiet group of three, who stood somewhat apart from the rest.

"Well, old fellow," smiled Harold, slapping his friend on the back, "you are indeed a great man. For a very long time I, myself, have thought of this very same thing and have wished that some prominent actor would speak or write about it. At last my wish has been fulfilled."

"Old friend, do you think I am right about it?" inquired Mr. Clairmont earnestly, resting his hand on Harold's shoulder.

"Of course I do. I wish more thought about it as you and I do."

"Well, I am one who thinks as you both do," announced Grace smiling.

"Grace," said Reginald, a shadow of a smile lighting his face as he took her hand in his and pressed it warmly, "don't your views coincide with mine because Armour's do?"

At first Grace feigned indignation, but then, failing in the attempt, she smiled. "O, no, Reginald," she answered, "it isn't that at all. I can assure you that I have individual opinions of my own."

"Well, Grace," said Mr. Clairmont, "I was only teasing. I appreciate your agreeing with me whether Armour does or not."

"There, I shall never again tell you how and what I think," declared Grace pouting, "because you think I agree with you simply because Harold does."

"Do women really think?" inquired Mr. Clairmont, smiling slightly.

"Of course they do," promptly resented Grace. "You men think, though, that women have no ideas of their own and perhaps, too, you labor under the impression that we can't think."

"Well, a great many of them can't or don't. Which is it?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if it were both," laughed Harold.

Mr. Clairmont laughed slightly and looked at Helene, who could not restrain a smile.

"Well," said Grace, with a somewhat flushed face, "if you both wish to be so stupid as to

labor under such an impression I certainly have no objection. Have you, Helene?"

"No, Grace," replied Helene smiling.

"Grace, I think women have just as much power to think as men," affirmed Mr. Clairmont.

"I am quite sure of that fact," acquiesced Harold.

"We were only trying to tease you a little. Were we not, Armour?"

"Yes," responded Harold. "We wanted to see you pout a bit."

"Well, I forgive you both," smiled Grace.

"Armour, do you know," said Mr. Clairmont, somewhat gravely, "I am afraid that a great many of those people will misconstrue what I said this evening."

"How so?"

"They will think, perhaps, that I am a sort of theorist or transcendentalist, when I am really nothing more than practical Reginald Clairmont."

"Well, old friend," laughed Harold reassuringly, laying his hand on Reginald's shoulder, "you need not feel worried on that score, for I think you explained your views most clearly and thoroughly."

"I hope I did."

"I endorse everything you uttered."

"I value your opinions above most men's, Armour," asserted Mr. Clairmont earnestly. He then turned to Helene and their eyes met for a moment. Then the violet depths, un-

able to endure the calm, searching gaze of the fine, dark ones, drooped and the long black lashes gently touched the flushed cheeks.

"May I ask Mrs. Clairmont's opinion on the subject?" inquired Reginald in low, earnest tones. He folded his arms across his chest and waited for her to speak.

Helene was very much agitated, and she rested her hand upon the back of a chair. When her answer came it was, despite her agitation, calm, sweet, and low. "Mr. Clairmont, have you not always known my opinion on the subject?"

And Reginald Clairmont was satisfied.

For a few days afterwards the newspapers were replete with the affair at the Garrick Club, and published verbatim Mr. Clairmont's impromptu talk or discourse. It all created quite a sensation and evoked much harsh criticism, as well as much praise.

Reginald Clairmont, noble as he was and with all his wealth and greatness, and too, a great many weaknesses, was not, by any means, a happy man.

CHAPTER XII

TWO PLAYS

"Is Mrs. Clairmont in?" asked Mr. Manlyn, Mr. Clairmont's manager, of the maid who answered his summons.

"Yes, sir; she's in," replied the girl, who scrutinized him closely before ushering him in and taking his card to her mistress. Soon she returned and informed him that Helene would be down in a very few minutes. It was indeed, only a moment after this announcement that the manager detected the swish of a woman's skirts and Helene entered, clad in a morning gown of soft cream silk, adorned with chiffon and delicate lace and slightly opened at the neck, leaving the exquisite white throat exposed.

"Good morning, Mrs. Clairmont. How are you to-day?"

"Good morning, Mr. Manlyn. I am quite well, thank you. And how are you, may I ask?"

"Thank you, I am always well, you know, Mrs. Clairmont," responded the manager smiling.

"This is, indeed, an agreeable surprise, Mr. Manlyn, and I am very glad to see you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Clairmont," returned Mr. Manlyn affably. "It is, I assure you, a very great pleasure and privilege to know you and to be permitted to call."

"Thank you," she replied sweetly.

"This morning, Mrs. Clairmont," he resumed, "I shall let my call be one of both pleasure and business."

"Then you are here to make a business and not a social call, Mr. Manlyn?"

"Yes, somewhat. I am here, Mrs. Clairmont, to converse with you in regard to a matter that is very important, first, to yourself, second to Mr. Clairmont's company, and, last of all, to Mr. Clairmont himself."

"What is it, Mr. Manlyn, that is so very important?" inquired Helene, slightly averting her face and looking down at the figures in the rug.

"It is this: If we offer you a salary of five hundred dollars per week, will you accept the position as leading woman in Mr. Clairmont's company?"

"Why, is Florence Grand ill?" asked Helene, glancing at the manager with a listless expression in her deep violet eyes.

"No; Miss Grand is not ill, but Clairmont and I want you because your interpretation and comprehension of art and its meaning and mission are absolutely perfect. Miss Grand's acting is above the average; indeed, hers is far above it, but we prefer one who is a great artist."

"Thank you, Mr. Manlyn, I value your opinions very highly. In accepting the position you offer, I dislike beyond measure to displace Miss Grand. I really think that it will be best for me to retain my present position, as it is a good one. It not only pays me well, but it affords me abundant opportunity to love and appreciate art to the fullest extent of my being."

"That may be true, but," persisted the manager earnestly, "if you will accept I will arrange everything most satisfactorily with Miss Grand and, I assure you, there will exist no ill-will between us."

"But I entertain scruples in the matter."

"If I should offer this to any other woman, she would cast all scruples to the four winds to play opposite so renowned an actor as Reginald Clairmont. She would not say a word about scruples, but would accept as soon as the offer was made. Indeed, we shall dispatch everything most satisfactorily. Will you accept?"

"Mr. Manlyn, I feel that I cannot."

"Why, Mrs. Clairmont?" pleaded the manager.

"Because I do not wish to displace her as leading woman."

"You should not hesitate on that score. It is not you asking me, but it is Clairmont and myself asking you. Next season we expect to produce two plays. The second one we shall put on about the third week in January.

In these two dramas we are exceedingly desirous of engaging you to fill the leading female roles. As I said before, we shall pay you a salary of five hundred dollars per week. In these two plays there is furnished abundant scope for fine work."

A soft, pensive expression pervaded Helene's dark eyes as she studied the figures in the rug, and a wave of delicate color swept over her face when she answered, in a low voice, "Mr. Manlyn, I will accept your offer. I do not accept it because of the salary nor because of the further renown I shall attain by becoming Mr. Clairmont's leading woman, but merely for art and the intense love I bear it."

"I know that," answered the manager, reverently. "You and Mr. Clairmont feel a deeper reverence for art than any other people I know."

"I think," said Helene simply, "every one should feel so."

"But they do not."

"No, not all, and it is a pity, too," she replied quietly.

Mr. Manlyn drew forth pen and paper and Helene signed a contract for the following year, after which the manager made his grateful adieux.

When he had gone and the door had been closed behind him, Helene sank into a chair and buried her face against its back. What would Myriam and Grace think if they knew

that she had consented to become Mr. Clairmont's leading woman? What would all the rest of them think? Above all, what would Mr. Clairmont himself think when Mr. Manlyn had unfolded to him her decision and shown him the contract? What would he think of her after hearing her say that she would retire from the stage before she would again become a member of his company? Would he think that, by again playing opposite him, she would willingly yield to a reconciliation and once more become his wife? This thought she quickly dispelled from her mind, yet she felt her face burn fearfully. "He will have perfect contempt for me," she thought. "He will, perhaps, despise me utterly after hearing me say what I did at Myriam's that evening." She buried her face deeper in the cushion and felt it burn more intensely. As she reviewed every conversation and dwelt upon every incident of the past, a great pain almost rent her heart. For a long, long time she remained thus and pondered on it all. She decided that she would not cancel but would abide by the contract made only a few hours ago.

The days came and passed and summer, too, came and passed and, with its end, the theatrical season began. In the early spring Helene had notified Mr. Hartburn of the contract existing between Mr. Clairmont and herself. He had expressed deep regret at losing her and wished her all the success and

happiness possible. All that spring and summer Helene had studied with indefatigable courage and zeal the roles in the two plays that were to be produced the following winter.

The first part of the season witnessed the production of "The Love of a King for His Queen." This drama was arranged and compiled by Mr. Clairmont from the many legends of King Arthur. The costumes and scenic effects used in the play were exquisitely beautiful and accorded perfectly with the time in which Arthur is said to have flourished.

The first act of the play opened with the elements in a most turbulent discord. The wind blew furiously. The waves rose higher and higher and dashed at each other in mad fury, with flames darting here and there on their crests, as if the Eumenides were angered and wished to hurl the world into eternal destruction. Two men were seen to emerge from the Tintagil castle in the distance. They approached the shore and gazed in silent awe and wonder at the waves, gilded with golden flames as they mounted higher, higher, higher. The two men, thus gazing, were Merlin and the sage, his teacher. As the two gazed intently on the sublime spectacle, a final wave, grander than them all, was borne aloft, then receded, and a sweet calm prevailed. A few moments of silence and then was seen, floating in the direction of the shore,

a ship in the shape of a dragon's wings, all draped in white and bearing three white-robed queens wearing crowns of gold. As it neared the shore, there was heard a tremendous peal of thunder. A sheet of lightning seemed to envelop the entire earth, and then a deep voice, which seemed to emanate from the unknown, was heard to say, "Hail, Merlin! Here is given to thee one who shall be King of England." Merlin saw a babe, clothed in white, at his feet. He raised it from the earth and then the ship, bearing the three queens, slowly, very slowly, floated back to the unknown. The two men silently watched it as it dreamily drifted away, and the curtain was lowered.

Scene second, act first, was a public road. The time was many years later. Traveling along this public road were Arthur and Sir Anthon's son, Gallymon, who were on their way to London. Arthur was ignorant of his true birth, for in infancy he was adopted by Sir Anthon, who was a good man. As Arthur and his friend pursued their journey, Gallymon remembered that he had neglected to bring his sword and requested Arthur to return home for it. On turning his horse, Arthur beheld something shining, almost imbedded in a huge rock. He approached, grasped the handle and, with scarcely an effort, drew forth the magical sword, Excalibur, on which was inscribed the sentence,

"He who draws me forth shall be King of England."

On seeing the brand with its bejeweled handle, Gallymon immediately demanded possession of it, but Arthur refused. They were on the verge of an altercation when Sir Anthon, with a number of knights, a large retinue and many others not of his train, was seen approaching. When he drew near, he inquired the cause of their delay and how Arthur came in possession of the sword. The son then narrated to the father how, having forgotten his sword, he dispatched Arthur for it, but ere Arthur departed he, himself, espied something shining in the rock and drew it forth and, to his great joy, discovered it to be the magic sword Excalibur. On beholding it Arthur demanded possession of it, but he refused to yield it up.

Then Sir Anthon listened to Arthur's version of the story and he, being a good man, determined to decide the matter by granting to each an opportunity to test his skill at drawing forth Excalibur. He had the brand reimbedded in the rock. Gallymon was permitted to try first. He failed, and then Arthur was urged to test his skill. With perfect ease he drew forth the weapon and, amidst loud applause and acclamations, was heralded King of England.

The second act represented the wild woods of Broceliande. In the shadow of a great oak tree, Vivien employed her sweetest

charms to decoy Merlin, the great magician, into unfolding to her his many wonderful secrets and his arts. Merlin at first divined her purpose, but not being able to resist her charms, he disclosed everything.

Act third pictured a scene at Caerleon, whither the Court had repaired for a season, and where was discovered the guilty love of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere, King Arthur's wife. There, too, was discussed, with much gusto, the approaching tournament, and there was much excited questioning as to who should be the victor. At the last one, Sir Launcelot had proven victorious. He had won, so far, six of the nine large diamonds, and would he win another? King Arthur possessed nine diamonds and it was his wont, at each joust, to present one of the priceless gems to the victor.

Act fourth told of the meeting of Elaine and Sir Launcelot. He intrusted to her, the "lily maid of Astolat," the keeping of his shield, and she, on his departure from her home, presented him with a crimson sleeve embroidered in pearls and asked him to wear it at the approaching tilt.

Scene second, act fourth, furnished a vivid picture of the tournaments held in the twelfth century. At first Sir Launcelot decided not to enter the lists, in order that he might remain with Guinevere, who feigned illness; but then he reconsidered and was numbered among the many combatants. The scene of

the joust was indeed a most brilliant one. Seats were arranged in tiers for the spectators, those highest of them all being occupied by King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, and their retinue. At either end of the lists were the many knights who were to participate. They were clad in coats of mail and wore visors. When the signal was given and the knights rushed to the center in a clash, there was unbounded excitement. The spectators watched with intense interest the combatants as, with shining lances, they rushed at each other hither and thither. After much fighting and wielding of weapons, the tournament closed, with the victor, unmasked, kneeling before the maiden whom he had crowned queen of love and beauty.

Act fifth represented the death of Elaine. Just before she died she sang:

"I fain would follow love, if that could be ;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me.
Call and I follow, I follow ! let me die."

Then she died, and in a barge all draped in black and propelled by her dumb servant, Elaine, the "lily maid of Astolat," who had died of a broken heart because of unrequited love, was slowly and quietly borne down the river. At a pause in the journey and near the shore, Arthur, Guinevere, many of the knights, and several ladies in waiting placed exquisite floral tributes in the barge and then they watched it as it slowly moved

away and silently and dreamily floated down the stream.

Scene two, act fifth, was an apartment in a convent. Queen Guinevere, who was weeping, was surrounded by nuns and novices, who essayed to comfort her. Not knowing she was Arthur's wife, they attempted to interest and divert her by telling her of the guilty love of Sir Launcelot, and Queen Guinevere and of how Guinevere, in her shame, fled from the castle. Of course all this only embittered her grief the more. Ere long Arthur entered and, in the shadows of the gloaming, the two, now, left alone, take farewell of each other forever. The scene between them was deeply pathetic. Guinevere recognized Arthur's nobleness when it was too late. Groveling at his feet and with her beautiful hair falling like a cloud about her, she confessed her guilt and implored forgiveness, but then it was too late, too late! As he was about to depart, he waved his hand over the bowed head in token of his blessing and eternal farewell. When he had gone, she staggered to the window to watch him as, in the purple shadows of the twilight, he rode away. Then she cried out to him with all her soul in the deepest and bitterest agony.

The sixth and last act pictured the "passing of Arthur." The first scene was an **apartment in the castle**. Arthur, who had been wounded in battle, lay ill upon a couch.

He commanded Sir Bedivere, who was his only attendant, to cast his sword, Excalibur, into the lake. The knight, desiring possession of it, twice disobeyed his master's orders. Arthur, much angered, commanded a third time.

Scene second was the lake on the margin of which Sir Bedivere is standing. The waves lapped and lashed against the crags. The moon, in all her silvery beauty, slowly and dreamily set in the west and, as if in token of farewell, converted the lake into a sparkling, shimmering sheet of silver. It was, indeed, a scene of beauty. Sir Bedivere, as if stricken with awe, hesitated a moment. Then he hurled the brand and it, bright with flame, circled round and round. Ere it dipped into the water, a hand, "white, mystical, wonderful," grasped it by the hilt, twirled it around three times and then vanished beneath the blue depths of the waves. Sir Bedivere was dazed and mystified.

The last scene was again on the shore of the lake. In the gray dawn of the morning, Sir Bedivere bore King Arthur to the margin of the blue waters. A barge, all draped in black and bearing three queens clad in the same somber hue and wearing crowns of gold, very calmly and slowly approached the shore. After bidding Sir Bedivere farewell, King Arthur was lifted into the barge and it slowly moved away. Farther and farther across the waters it moved and fainter and

fainter it became. Sir Bedivere, in the twilight of the morning, strained his vision until the barge dwindled to a mere speck and then vanished into the Unknown. Thus passed away the mystical king who labored "to crush the heathen and uphold the Christ."

In "The Love of a King for His Queen" the leading roles were impersonated by Reginald Clairmont and Miss Helene Balfour, who, off the stage, was known as Mrs. Clairmont, but on the programmes and play-bills was printed Miss Helene Balfour. Such a rare combination had never before been known in New York except when the union of the two great stars had been seen in "The Last Days of Pompeii." "The Love of a King for His Queen" captured the great city by storm and the critics and papers rendered the universal verdict that it was the greatest success witnessed in many years. Miss Balfour and Mr. Clairmont appeared to even greater advantage, and there was still the same skill and fine polish about his acting that marked his other roles.

This play continued the bill at the Clairmont Theatre until the middle of January, when it was supplanted by "The First Violin," a most beautiful and refreshing drama, which, like its predecessor, scored a phenomenal success.

The play opened with the scene of the Koln railway station. A beautiful English girl, who had come to Germany to perfect

her voice, had been lost by her friends, and knew not what to do, as she did not speak the language. She wandered up and down in the vain hope of discovering them, when she encountered Eugen Courvoisier and unfolded to him her troubles.

The second and third scenes told of their lunching together, of his endeavoring to teach her a few words in German and, finally, of their going to a cathedral and listening to an exquisitely beautiful vocal solo.

Act second, scene first, told of May Wedderburn cutting Eugene Courvoisier at a production of the opera "Lohengrin." Eugen was first violinist in the orchestra. He seemed not to have noticed the cut.

Scene second was several months later when, after having studied voice under Max Von Francius, the musical director, May Wedderburn sang at a probe and scored quite a success. Of course, Eugen Courvoisier, who was first violinist in the orchestra, was there, heard her, and went away dreaming of her.

Scene third was a small apartment in which were numerous books, sheets of music, and other articles. In one corner were a piano and a violin case. There were seated in this room Friedhelm Helfen, Eugen's best friend, and Courvoisier, who was holding upon his knees his little son, Sigmund, clad in his little nightgown ready for retiring. Suddenly a knock was heard at the door, May Wedder-

burn entered, and proffered Courvoisier the amount of money he had expended for her that day at the Koln railway station. He refused to accept the money and even to acknowledge her acquaintance. She turned away weeping.

Act third, scene first, was a party skating upon a sheet of ice. May Wedderburn, who did not know any of them, was skating alone. Toward evening, when all had taken their departure, she, in attempting to reach a certain goal, suddenly fell with the crushing in of the ice. She was rescued by Eugen.

Scene second was a peasant's room. Courvoisier and the landlady endeavored to induce Miss Wedderburn to partake of a glass of hot spirits and water, which she finally did, from the hand of the first violinist. Eugen was then left alone with the woman's children, whom he made laugh and cry with delight while he awaited Miss Wedderburn, who had retired to change wet clothes for dry ones. She soon returned, however, clad in a peasant costume.

Scene third was their walk home in the twilight.

Act fourth, scene first, pictured the masquerade ball. May Wedderburn and Friedhelfen were engaged in conversation when they were approached by Anna Sartorius, who told them to ask Courvoisier about the twentieth of April, five years before. At this ball occurred the unfolding of two hearts,

those of Adelaide, sister to May Wedderburn and wife of a wicked old man, and Max Von Francius, the musical director.

Scene second shifted to the Tonhalle. May Wedderburn entered to practice and get some music. On perceiving Courvoisier at the piano, she gathered up a few songs and was preparing to leave, when he turned and asked her to accompany him while he played on his violin. While they were playing Friedhelm Helfen and Karl Linders came in, and then the four enjoyed some very delightful music.

Scene third was a concert hall. During one of the intermissions Karl Linders was challenged by Anna Sartorius to confront Courvoisier, in the presence of the audience and all his friends, with the mystery of the 20th of April five years before.

The last act, scene first, was a bridge of boats which, in a most violent storm, was being rapidly propelled down the river Rhine. Alone on this bridge of boats were Eugene Courvoisier and May Wedderburn, who unfolded their hearts to each other. Their journey was indeed a happy one.

The last scene was the reconciliation of Courvoisier with his sister and brother. The mystery of the 20th of April five years before was divulged by Anna Sartorius, who, after her narration of the story, vanished as quickly as she had come. And all was well.

Reginald Clairmont had resolved from the beginning of his career as an actor always to place before the public clean plays—plays that were not even in the slightest degree suggestive. He had never once violated that noble resolution. It was his prime ambition to uphold the beauty, grandeur, and nobleness of his profession, to elevate the dramatic art to the very acme of all that was pure, beautiful, and artistic—for true art, he argued, could not be coarse and unseemly, but was beautiful and ennobling, and at last to uplift the taste, mind and heart of the public. He loved and revered art too much to corrupt and drag it in the dirt. The stage was to him the grandest of all professions, and he believed dramatic art was the queen of all the arts.

Reginald Clairmont, like his father, was a man of noble thoughts and aspirations. So was Helene Balfour, his leading woman, a person who advocated a high standard in everything and cherished the most lofty ideals. It can indeed be said of all the members of his company and, too, of all the employees, that they were good, noble people and that they, like the two great stars, were fired with that same intense enthusiasm and deep reverence for the theatrical profession.

"The First Violin" continued the bill at the Clairmont Theatre until the first week in May. During the entire season, when impersonating the leading female roles of both

plays, Helene was unable to dispel a slight feeling of nervousness and embarrassment when in the presence of Mr. Clairmont, the man who had once been her husband and whom she had once loved. He, however, had always seemed thoroughly dispassionate and coldly indifferent. During the last performance of the "The First Violin" for that season, Helene seemed a trifle more nervous and embarrassed than usual. In the scene where, together floating on a bridge of boats down the river, Eugen unbosoms his very thoughts to May Wedderburn, Helene felt strange feelings penetrate her very soul—feelings which, try as she would, she could not dispel. She wondered if Mr. Clairmont experienced any similar sensations, but thought not, for he was so calm, so cool, so quiet. When Eugen Courvoisier placed his arm about May Wedderburn and they thoroughly understand each other, Mr. Clairmont drew Helene more closely to him and inclined his head more than necessary. His magnificent barytone voice seemed deeper and more tender than usual and sounded as if a sad, but sweet and floating melody were being played upon his vocal keyboard. Helene drew herself slightly away from him, but nothing was suspected by the very large and brilliant audience.

When the curtain was finally lowered at the end of the last act, Helene and Mr. Clairmont uttered a sigh of relief, for after so

brilliant a season they felt tired and that they needed a period of rest. The rest, they knew, would be sweet and refreshing after so laborious and prosperous a year.

CHAPTER XIII

AT CRAYTON

Crayton was a very picturesque and fashionable summer resort, nestling among the fair, green hills and overlooking a most beautiful lake, which in the gleam of the golden sunshine seemed to sleep and to dream. This resort was, indeed, a most lovely place, with its magnificent hotels, cottages, and summer residences; with its attractive grounds, fine drives, golf links, tennis courts, and, above all, its drowsy lake, which, like a great opal, shimmered and sparkled with opalescent hues when the warm sunbeams smiled upon it. Crayton was, indeed, a place for both rest and gaieties. It was there that the greater part of the fashionable set enjoyed many pleasures during the heated term. It was there that the Burleighs, Fosters, Chelcys, and Krokors possessed elegantly-appointed summer residences.

The home of the Krokors was, indeed, a most elegant one. It was built of dark stone with windows reaching down to the floor and opening on to a kind of portico. This portico, which extended across the entire front of the building was bordered with large Doric

columns with a carved iron railing between. At one end of this veranda was a settle and back of the settle, upon the iron railing, were small wires upon which were trained morning-glory vines, which early in the morning might be seen covered with purple blossoms kissed by the sparkling dewdrops and fondled by the sunbeams. Surrounding the house were beautiful and well-kept grounds, and at one side was a convenient porte-cochere.

As Mr. Clairmont had decided to remain in America the entire summer and not play abroad for several weeks, it was then, on the ides of May, that the Krokors and their household installed themselves in their summer home at Crayton. One evening, about ten days after their arrival, Mr. and Mrs. Kroker and Gerald were seated on the portico.

"Mother, I want to ask a favor of you," remarked Gerald.

"What is it, my dear?" inquired the kind lady, with a sweet smile parting her lips.

"It is this, mother," continued the son quietly. "Clairmont arrived a little over two hours ago and I should like so much to have him be with us during his visit to Crayton. Surely you will have no objections to my inviting him."

"No, Gerald, not as far as your father and myself are concerned, but there are Lydia and Helene. I should be only too delighted to have him, for indeed he has changed much

and is a grand man. I should esteem it a great honor to entertain such a man."

"I, too," rejoined old Mr. Kroker, "should feel most proud and happy to have that famous man our guest; but, Gerald, your mother is right, for there are the feelings of your aunt and cousin to be considered."

"Father," said Gerald earnestly, "you and mother know well enough that Grace has always spoken kindly of Clairmont, and that he and she are the best of friends. Aunt Lydia, too, thinks a great deal of Clairmont, for only yesterday she told me what she thought of him. If to-day he were to ask Helene to forget the past and to begin life over again, Aunt Lydia would not offer the slightest objection."

"That is all true, dear; but Helene is principally the one to be considered. She and Mr. Clairmont speak to each other and that is all."

"Then, mother, if Helene does not object, will you consent to my inviting him?" inquired Gerald earnestly.

"Yes, dear; I shall be too happy to have him be our guest."

"Father, what are your wishes about it?"

"Your mother's answer is mine," replied the old man, with a tender cadence in his voice. So it was determined then that, if Helene offered no objection, Mr. Clairmont would be invited to be a guest in the home of the Krokors. They had arrived at this con-

clusion, when there was a swish of skirts and Helene Clairmont emerged from the doorway.

"Is that you, Helene?" questioned Gerald, who was unable to recognize her in the darkness.

"Yes, it is I," she answered in a low, rich voice.

"Are you going over to the St. Charles Hotel? You know there is to be an impromptu dance this evening."

"Yes, I know," replied Helene; "but I really have no desire to go. While out driving this afternoon Mr. Brosk asked me if I were going over to the hotel this evening, and he said that if I were, he would see that I spent a few hours very pleasantly. I thanked him, and told him I would decide later."

"Your decision is?"

"My decision is to remain right where I am," she answered, with perfect indifference.

"My dear, I should think you would enjoy it far more there than here. Then, too, Mr. Brosk is so very pleasant."

"Yes, I know he is," she returned, somewhat wearily; "but, Aunt Julia, I really do not care about it."

"Don't insist, my dear, if she doesn't feel inclined to go," gently remonstrated Mr. Kroker.

"I only thought she would enjoy it," explained Mrs. Kroker.

"It is very kind of you, Aunt Julia, to want me to spend a pleasant evening," said Helene.

It was growing a trifle cool, and Mr. and Mrs. Kroker arose and, after bidding the two good-night, retired.

"Helene, is it too cool out here for you? If so, we can go in."

"No, indeed; not in the least. I will, however, adjust this scarf about my shoulders to insure against my taking cold," and she folded it about her, as she was attired in evening costume. At Gerald's suggestion they walked to that end of the portico where the morning-glories grew and seated themselves upon the settle. The bright stars sparkled and glowed far away in the blue depths of the heavens. Helene looked up at them and saw shining there the Pleiades, the seven stars, in all their pale beauty, one fainter than the rest. She thought of the seven sisters whom Orion pursued because he was enamored of them and whom, in dire distress, Jupiter metamorphosed into pigeons and then made a constellation. It seemed strange to her that the seven should have fled from Orion because he loved them. Helene was still thinking of the Pleiades and dreamily studying them, when Gerald broke the silence.

"Helene, there is something I want to ask you."

"What is it, Gerald?"

"Have you any objection to my inviting Clairmont to spend some time with us while he is here? If you have, why then I shall forego the pleasure of having him in our midst."

Helene leaned against the back of the settle, clasped her hands tightly together and looked up at the great, silent, golden stars shining far away. Fortunately for her it was dark, so Gerald could not see her face flush and her lips quiver. She was silent for a time and Gerald thought by her not speaking that she disapproved of the idea. When she spoke her answer came in a low voice. "Rest assured, Gerald, that your inviting Mr. Clairmont will not displease me. Indeed, I have no objection whatever. I am quite sure that there never will be, either on his part or on mine, a desire to renew the relations that once existed between us. I feel confident that neither of us will even wish to be good friends. Still, his presence here will not in the slightest offend me. He and I can remain on speaking terms."

"I am afraid his being here might be unpleasant to you."

"You need not worry about that, Gerald," she said indifferently. "His presence, I assure you, will not offend me."

"Are you quite sure, Helene?" persisted Gerald eagerly, leaning forward to catch her words, while she rested so far back against

the settle that the morning-glory leaves touched her cheek.

After drawing a long breath she answered "Gerald, I am quite sure."

"Thank you so much, Helene, for allowing me to ask him. If he were the same man now that he was four years ago, I should not for one moment beg this of you; but, Helene, he is changed, vastly changed. The public, and especially the New York public, loves and admires him extravagantly. As for his friends, they almost worship him."

"Yes," she said in a low voice, "I know he is a far different man now from what he was four years ago. Perhaps, if he had been then what he is now, there might not have been a separation. But since we are apart we shall forever remain so, and only speak in passing."

She ceased speaking. A soft breeze came and fanned the morning-glory leaves against her face. She longed to ask Mr. Clairmont to forgive her for being so cruel to him at the Garrick Club, Mr. Hansell's dinner, and at Myriam Chelcy's. But then, she thought, she would not humiliate herself by asking him to forgive even the slightest thing, so she decided to let it pass and allow the future to unfold its own. There was a long silence.

"Helen, have you heard the rumor?"

"No; what rumor?"

"It is reported that Clairmont and Miss Foster are engaged. Chelcy said he heard it from good authority. He informed me that they had not decided definitely upon the date of the wedding. It is said that Miss Foster is very proud of the idea of becoming the wife of the grandest American actor."

"I was not aware that he cared anything for her," she said quietly.

"Neither was I."

"Gerald, from whom did Mr. Chelcy gather the information?" she asked, with forced indifference.

"From Palmer, Miss Foster's first cousin. Chelcy said Palmer informed him that Clairmont visited his cousin all last winter and spent nearly every Sunday evening with her. Now, since she has honored Crayton with her presence, her coming has induced Clairmont to visit this very pleasant summer resort also."

"There must be some truth in the rumor if Mr. Palmer be quietly confiding it to his different friends."

"Yes; but the most amusing part about it is that Palmer and Chelcy are not the best of friends. They are only tolerably well acquainted."

"Do you think it is true, Gerald?" she asked in quiet tones.

"I do not know whether to believe it or not," he answered dubiously. Then he add-

ed, "They say that Clairmont and Miss Foster are desperately in love with each other."

Helene closed her eyes for a moment and allowed the gentle breeze to touch her face with the morning-glory leaves. They felt so cooling and refreshing, for her face burned fearfully and seemed as if it were on fire. Was it true that they were engaged? Was Reginald really in love with Miss Foster? But why should she care? She did not care. She would not care. It was immaterial to her whom Mr. Clairmont married or to whom he became affianced. She wondered, if he married again, whether he would abandon his profession or not. But no, he loved his art above all things, and even above all others, except—Miss Foster. Miss Foster, though, was not an actress. His father had been so anxious for him to enter the practice of law. Did the old man know of his son's greatness? Did her own father, too, know of her trouble and successes? Of those successes which had brought such exquisite pleasure? Of those sorrows which had almost rent her heart in twain? But then, why should her father know of all her suffering? It were far better that he did not know. She wondered if Mrs. Foster objected to Mr. Clairmont, but then why should she? He was a changed man. He was, indeed, a noble and famous man. Was he not the brightest star of all the bright stars shining in the theatrical heavens? Why should

not Miss Foster feel proud to be the wife of such a man? With all of his weaknesses, why should she not feel proud that she had won the love of a man who was so great, so true, so noble? Why should she not give him her life, her love, her all?

Helene clasped her hands tightly and bowed her head upon them. She resolved that she would, in the near future, ask Reginald Clairmont to forgive her for what she had done and said, cost her what it might. Her bosom heaved, her breath came and went spasmodically, and she shivered slightly.

"What is it, Helene?"

"I am a little cool, that is all. I think I shall go in," she said, rising and entering the house, leaving Gerald alone to dreamily study the Pleiades.

CHAPTER XIV

THE STARS

It was after much hesitation and a great deal of persuasion that Gerald induced Reginald Clairmont to accept his very pressing invitation. So, on the morning following Gerald's conversation with Helene the evening before, Reginald dispatched Percival, his valet, with his baggage to the residence of the Krokors.

It was just the hour before dinner, when Helene, after having enjoyed a sweet siesta and made her toilette, passed down stairs and out to the portico. As she wended her way through the hall she glanced in all the rooms, but saw no one. It was evident that everybody was out for a walk or a drive before the most fashionable of all repasts. She walked to the end of the portico where the morning-glories grew and stood slightly leaning against the settle.

It was an hour of stillness. The air was fresh and sweet with the perfume of the flowers, the little birds softly carolled their evening hymns before retiring to their nests for the night, and the morning-glories had long ago drooped their tiny purple heads and

gently fallen asleep. The sky was a clear blue with a few gossamer white clouds floating here and there. In the west there were masses of gold, rose, and purple clouds, and in the east the moon was rising in all her queenly beauty and flooding the earth with a silvery sheen.

Helene allowed her eyes to wander over the beautiful landscape, and watched as—

“Silently, one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven, Blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the angels.”

She allowed, too, her eyes to rest on the dreamy lake, not far away, nestling in the arms of the lingering sunbeams. She was standing there, looking pensively over all this scene of marvelous beauty and thinking of the past, when some one stepped upon the portico. Helene turned and saw who it was. It was Mr. Clairmont, and he went quietly toward her. As he approached, she became slightly pale and there was no smile parting her proud, beautiful lips. He extended his hand, which she seemed not to notice and merely said, “How do you do, Mr. Clairmont.”

“Is it always to be with us Mrs. Clairmont and Mr. Clairmont?” he inquired, the slight smile dying on his lips and his face becoming cold and hard.

“Yes, always,” she answered, in quite an indifferent tone.

"I thought that when we met," he went on, with withering sarcasm, "our meeting here would be a very pleasant one. I even flattered myself that your reception of me would be a far more friendly one than that which you accorded to a mere acquaintance. I see now that it all was a piece of utter presumption on my part, and I humbly beg your pardon for flattering myself so much. I might have known what greeting to expect from you. Henceforth I shall not be so presuming."

"Mr. Clairmont," she returned coldly, "doubtless you are aware that some people are conceited enough to flatter themselves too much, and such people, as a consequence, not infrequently have their pride cut."

"Indeed, Mrs. Clairmont," he replied, with an ironical smile, "that has been my observation. I thought," he continued, folding his arms across his breast and leaning against one of the large Doric columns, "that, as your mother and Mr. and Mrs. Kroker were so friendly and cordial to me, you would not be so freezing. I have not seen Grace." After a pause he inquired, with a laugh, "Then we shall never be friends?"

"No," she answered; "it is best for us to remain as we are."

He bit his lip in reply and there was a constrained pause. Helene, somewhat embarrassed, toyed with the morning-glory leaves.

"Mr. Clairmont, I hear that you are engaged to be married. Allow me to congratulate you," she remarked, after a moment, averting her face and gazing at the gold and purple clouds far away.

"O, is that why Mrs. Clairmont deems it best that we should not be friends?" he asked with an ironical smile. "Why should not an engaged or even a married man enjoy the friendship of another woman beside that of his fiancée or his wife?"

"Perhaps you are aware, Mr. Clairmont, that not a few of such friendships are dangerous," she answered icily, still averting her face.

"If either of us, or even both of us, were married," he said, with a laugh, "I don't think a friendship existing between you and me would be likely to prove very hazardous."

"No, I should think not, since we entered suit for divorce and are separated. It is not likely that we should be over-anxious to seek a renewal of our connubial bliss," she returned, with a derisive laugh.

"Mrs. Clairmont," he said with freezing coldness, "allow me to assure you that a renewal of our former relations is the last of my desires. The very idea of such a thing is, indeed, most odious to me."

"Permit me to say, Mr. Clairmont, that we agree most cordially on that score."

There was a short pause. Then he said, "Mrs. Clairmont, since we are not to be hus-

band and wife, lovers, nor even friends, I trust that my future wife will be honored with your friendship."

"Thank you. I appreciate your desiring your wife and me to be friends," she replied in a calm voice, no longer turning her face away from him. For a moment they looked straight into each other's eyes. Then Helene's drooped and rested on the carnations at her breast. She felt deeply depressed and wished that Reginald Clairmont had never come to Crayton. He was looking so strong and well, so grand and noble. Still, with all that, there was a faint shadow of sadness and bitterness about his firm mouth and in his dark eyes, a shadow of sadness and bitterness that would never be effaced, no matter how happy he should be. Was it a wonder, then that Matille Foster should love him?

Mr. Clairmont thought that he had never seen Helene look so proud, so queenly, so beautiful, with her perfect figure and with that wistful, far-away expression in her great, unfathomable violet eyes. When he spoke again it was in a low, earnest, almost pleading tone. "Helene, let us be friends. If you will give me your friendship I shall never, as long as I live, ask you for more. Indeed, I hope I shall not be such an idiot as to ask it."

"Do you not think it is presuming of you to ask this much?" she questioned in a low voice.

He ignored her question and said, almost yearningly, "Helene, I do not ask you to forget, but I do ask you to forgive a little and let us be friends. I swear to you, Helene, that if you will give me your friendship I will never, as long as I live, ask you for more."

He looked into her deep, shadowy eyes, but saw nothing that was relenting.

"Do you think," she asked in a low, agitated tone, "that I can soon forget the past; forget your cruel insults to me? Do you think that, if you were in my place, you could soon forget or even forgive?"

Helene was so agitated that she could say no more, and she leaned heavily against the settle for support. A great hardness and bitterness marked Mr. Clairmont's features as he watched the woman before him. He thought that her extreme agitation was the result of the intense anger and contempt she felt for him. There was a long silence between them, during which these two gazed into vacancy and watched the fireflies dance and lighten the purple gloaming. When Helene spoke it was in a calm, cool tone. "Mr. Clairmont, I have given my answer. It is that we remain as we are, mere acquaintances."

"Mrs. Clairmont," he returned, with freezing coldness and with a proud, kingly bearing, "rest assured, I shall abide strictly by your decision. I feel that I have no right to your friendship; that you have decided

for the best, and that it is best for us to remain as we are, mere acquaintances."

It was all Helene could do to control her feelings. She felt that she must remain firm. She almost knew that Reginald was engaged to Miss Foster. She knew, too, that since he was so changed, if she were to give him her friendship, knowing of his engagement, the result of it all might be sadly unfortunate for her. Helene was determined that before she would be so weak as to yield to her feelings she would become coldly indifferent, enter all the pleasures of life, and crush every deep feeling until she had conquered and could entirely conceal her inner self.

Reginald felt, too, that, as Helene would not and could not forget and at least forgive the past, he would devote himself more assiduously to his art, enjoy some pleasures, and rigidly veil his inner feelings from the outside world. Helene and Reginald had arrived at these conclusions when Gerald approached them, and the three then adjourned to the drawing-room. A moment later Grace and Harold came in.

"Why, how do you do, Grace? I am more than delighted to see you," exclaimed Mr. Clairmont, rising and grasping her hand in his strong one, while a smile slightly tinged with sadness played about his noble mouth.

"Reginald, this is indeed a happy pleasure for me and for us all," said Grace, smiling sweetly. "You are looking well."

"I am glad of that. It makes me happy to know that I can say the same about you. I don't think I ever saw you looking better."

"Thank you."

"Yes, Grace," he continued, releasing her hand and resuming his seat, "I am quite well." Then he asked, with a smile, "What accounts for your looking so? Is it that you and Armour have had no lovers' quarrels? You are aware that true love never runs smooth?"

"No, that is not it," she replied blushing. "You know Harold and I never quarrel."

"Yes, I know you do not; I was only teasing. Armour is a dear old fellow. He, Chelcy, and Kroker are my best friends."

"You are right, Clairmont," acquiesced Gerald. "Armour is a dear old fellow."

"Old friends, I thank you both," said Harold, with a smile. "I think I shall have to make my best bow."

At this juncture Mrs. Balfour and Mr. and Mrs. Kroker entered, and soon after all went in to dinner. At the table Mr. and Mrs. Kroker sat at the head and foot respectively. On Mr. Kroker's right were arranged Reginald, Helene and Mrs. Balfour, while on his left were seated Harold, Grace, and Gerald.

It seemed so strange to Helene that she should sit beside the man whom she once had loved and known as her husband. It, too, seemed strange to Reginald that he should sit beside the woman whom he had

once loved and known as his wife. Helene felt strangely timid and did not for one moment turn her head in Mr. Clairmont's direction. He, however, glanced at her from time to time. Only once during the meal did their eyes meet.

"Helene," asked Grace, "have you met Mr. Palmer, Matille Foster's cousin?"

"No; but I hear that he is quite an agreeable man," returned Helene, looking across at her sister, who sat opposite.

"I had the pleasure of meeting him this morning," continued Grace, "and I found him most charming."

"Armour, I advise you to keep a very close vigil over that young woman. She might escape you," said Mr. Clairmont with a laugh.

"I fear I shall have to follow your advice, Clairmont," replied Harold smiling.

"Armour, I tell you it is no laughing matter."

"I am quite aware of that."

"Reginald, have you ever been served that way?" Grace asked teasingly.

"In what way, Grace?"

"Did you ever have a man alienate the affections of the woman you loved and afterward assume complete possession of her?"

The moment before Mr. Clairmont had been smiling, but now he suddenly became grave. "No, Grace," he answered, quietly; "I am very thankful to say that I have never suffered such a misfortune."

There was an oppressive silence, and Grace deeply deplored having asked the question. Gerald, endeavoring to rectify matters, changed the subject by asking, "Are any of you going to Miss Foster's card party this evening?"

"Why, of course; we all are going, except mother, Uncle George, and Aunt Julia," promptly responded Grace.

After the conclusion of the meal, Grace and Helene repaired to their rooms to add a few touches to their toilettes. Grace was gowned in soft white, while Helene wore delicate blue mull. At her breast nestled a bunch of pink carnations, and never before had she seemed more striking.

Miss Foster's card party was a small and select affair. It was given in compliment to her cousin, Mr. Frederick Palmer, who had recently returned from a five-year tour abroad. Mr. Palmer was an exceedingly handsome man, with dark gray eyes, black hair, and a heavy black moustache. He was passionately fond of sports and was a member of many clubs. Miss Foster was quite proud of her cousin, and she wanted him to meet and know all of her friends. On this occasion she proved herself to be a most charming hostess.

The last game had been announced. Mr. Clairmont and Mrs. Burleigh, a pretty young woman, approached and seated themselves at the table occupied by Helene and Mr.

Chelcy, who had lost the preceding game and, of course, were compelled to remain seated. Necessarily there was a change of partners, Mrs. Burleigh facing Mr. Chelcy, and Helene, Mr. Clairmont. Mr. Chelcy and Helene were introduced to Mrs. Burleigh, who, having received the deal, dealt the cards and turned the jack of clubs. After all had passed, she took up the jack of clubs and said, "Now, Mr. Chelcy, since this is the last game, we must play well and not lose it. I think my score is quite a good one, and perhaps if we win this one I shall have a sufficient number of points to get a prize."

"Rest assured I shall do my best," replied her partner.

Mrs. Burleigh was a very pretty young woman and extremely garrulous. Indeed, she was so much so that she scarcely afforded an opportunity for any one to edge in a word. She had been married only a short time, and most young married women are very voluble.

"Mrs. Clairmont, is this your first visit to Crayton?" Mrs. Burleigh inquired, as she played a card.

"Yes; it is my first visit."

"Do you like it?"

"Yes; very much," Helene responded simply.

"Mr. Clairmont, do you, too, like Crayton?" queried that very voluble young married woman, turning to Reginald.

"Mrs. Burleigh," he replied quietly, "this, too, is my first visit here. Although I have been here only a day and night, I am prepossessed in its favor."

"I am quite sure," continued Mrs. Burleigh, directing her conversation to Helene, "that you, Mrs. Clairmont, must have found Crayton rather dull the first two weeks you were here."

"Why should you imagine so?" inquired Helene somewhat indifferently.

"Because your husband was not with you then. Since he has come, I know you find everything so much pleasanter. I think when one's husband is away one feels terribly lonely and desolate. I know I do. I can't endure the idea of having my husband away from me a single day. It nearly makes me ill when he is absent from me. How did you manage to leave Mr. Clairmont? I noticed that you were here two whole weeks before he came."

A burning blush swept over Helene's face and throat as she laid down her last card. Did not Mrs. Burleigh know of her separation from Mr. Clairmont? If she did not know, did she ask such a question just to cause her embarrassment and inflict pain upon her? Or if she did not know, why should she be so inquisitive? Mrs. Burleigh most certainly was not interested in her private affairs. Mr. Clairmont seemed thoroughly indifferent, Mr. Chelcy quite uncom-

fortable, while Helene was slightly perplexed and knew not how to answer. She did not wish to inform Mrs. Burleigh, whom she had just met, that she and Mr. Clairmont were divorced, so she merely answered, "Mr. Clairmont was quite busy when we left New York and so was necessarily detained."

At that moment the bell rang and the game was over, Mr. Chelcy and Mrs. Burleigh winning by a few points. Salads and ices were served, after which the prizes were awarded. Mrs. Burleigh captured the ladies' first. Just before the guests prepared to take their departure, Miss Foster approached Helene's table where the four were standing, and said: "Mrs. Clairmont, I am very sorry to inform you that Mr. Brosk was taken ill and so was compelled to leave early in the evening. He begged me to explain to you, and said that he hoped you would understand. I regret very much that this should have happened, but of course it could not be helped. I will," continued Miss Foster, "provide you with another escort."

"Miss Foster," said Helene, with quiet dignity, "I appreciate most thoroughly the situation, and thank you for offering to provide me with an escort. You need not trouble about it, for I feel quite sure that Grace and Mr. Armour will not object to my joining them."

Without affording Miss Foster an opportunity to speak, Mr. Clairmont said in a low

voice, "Will Mrs. Clairmont honor me by accepting my escort to her villa?"

Helene felt that she could not refuse his offer, so answered calmly, "I appreciate and accept Mr. Clairmont's escort.

Mrs. Burleigh closely scrutinized Helene, who quietly stood beside Mr. Clairmont. Helene felt the intense gaze and turned away.

"To-day week," began Miss Foster, "I shall entertain at a little musicale in compliment to my cousin. Fred possesses a remarkably good tenor voice. Now, Mr. Clairmont, won't you sing for me on that evening?"

"Miss Foster, I esteem it a great pleasure and a privilege to sing at one of your musicales, but I regret deeply that I shall have to forego that pleasure."

"Why, Mr. Clairmont."

"Just now I am not in very good voice," he replied, with a slight smile. He did not care to tell her that he had no one to play his accompaniment.

"That is all nonsense about being in good voice," said Miss Foster, somewhat impatiently. "Why do you refuse to oblige me?"

Helene quietly glanced from one to the other, but could discover nothing that would indicate that they were engaged.

"Miss Foster, I know of no one who understands my voice and who will play my accompaniment."

"You have often remarked that Mrs. Clairmont understood your voice perfectly. Will she not accompany you?"

Helene colored slightly, but did not speak. All seemed a trifle embarrassed.

After a moment Miss Foster turned to Helene. "Mrs. Clairmont, won't you play for him to sing?"

"Perhaps," answered Helene simply, "Mr. Clairmont would prefer an expert pianist."

"But," persisted Miss Foster, "you understand his voice and he your touch and expression."

"Perhaps Mrs. Clairmont would rather not be annoyed," observed Reginald somewhat coldly.

Every one gazed at Helene, and Mrs. Burleigh wondered why she hesitated and did not wish to play her husband's accompaniment.

"Fred is going to sing an a and b number," went on Miss Foster, "and I shall accompany him. Mr. Westburn has kindly consented to render a violin solo, and Miss Sherman, too, has promised to furnish a piano selection. Mr. Clairmont," she added pleadingly, "I did so much want you to sing, and I did not imagine that you would refuse me."

"Miss Foster, you can easily find a substitute," said Mr. Clairmont, with a smile.

"No, I can't," she answered. "Mr. Chelcy," she implored, "can't you prevail upon Mrs. Clairmont to accommodate us just once?"

Mr. Chelcy seemed embarrassed, but said, "Mrs. Clairmont, permit me to add my pleadings to those of Miss Foster. Please play Clairmont's—"

He was interrupted by Reginald, who shot him a very fierce glance and touched him on the arm. Mr. Chelcy of course said no more.

Helene stood calm, proud, beautiful. "Miss Foster," came in a low, clear voice, "I will oblige you, with pleasure."

"Thank you, Mrs. Clairmont."

Mrs. Burleigh looked perplexed, but said nothing, though she longed so much to know all about it. So it was arranged then that Reginald Clairmont would sing and that Helene would accompany him.

The evening arrived for Miss Foster's musicale, which was held in the private ball-room of the St. Charles Hotel. The oblong room was artistically decorated with smilax, cut flowers, and many potted plants, which were effectively placed here and there in great profusion. Miss Foster was becomingly gowned in soft blue, while her mother wore black with touches of white. Helene was costumed in a delicate white crepe gown that was soft, filmy, and clinging. Her hair, black as night, was arranged pompadour, and at her breast nestled a bunch of white carnations, the gift of an unknown friend. Helene was passionately fond of flowers, and this unknown friend had honored her with a box of the choicest of them every day since her

divorce four years ago. Though she had exerted every effort, yet she had never discovered any clew to that kind donor. On this evening, however, Helene, regal as she always was, looked cold and proud, but beautiful. Mr. Palmer and Mr. Brosk could not forbear gazing upon her.

The first number on the program was the overture to "Tannhauser," exquisitely rendered by the Schubert Band. The next consisted of two songs, and a and b number, first "Italy," by Mendelssohn and second "To be sung on the Waters," by Schubert. These two songs were delightfully given by Mr. Frederick Palmer, who did indeed possess a rare tenor voice. For an encore he gave that charming little selection, "Wandering in the Woods," by Grieg. Following Mr. Palmer was a violin solo by Mr. Ernest Westburn. He played a difficult but beautiful arrangement of "Faust." His encore was Massenet's "Twilight," which he rendered with beauty and expression.

Fourth on the program was Mr. Clairmont. His selection was "Calm as the Night." This he sang with exquisite sweetness and intensity of feeling, his magnificent barytone voice filling with ease every part of the room. Ah, what a voice was Reginald Clairmont's! so clear, so deep, so expressive. He responded with Tosti's "Could I." This song is truly beautiful and is indeed a musical gem. Never before in all his life until

that evening had Reginald Clairmont sung it as he did, with all the power and feeling of his soul. As his voice flowed out in melody, one would have thought that he was begging, imploring some one, in the deepest entreaty, to requite his love and come back to him. He received encore after encore, and at last responded with "Love's Sorrow," which he loved for the sweet but sad memories associated with it.

Miss Sherman then played with effect and brilliancy Chopin's second scherzo. Though she was encored, she did not respond. The last number on the program was Schubert's "Goodnight," which was exquisitely sung by Mr. Palmer. The musicale being over, salads and ices were served at small tables.

"Mrs. Clairmont, will you not honor me with the pleasure of a little tete-a-tete on the veranda before you say good-night?" Mr. Palmer asked earnestly.

"Yes, Mr. Palmer," she answered with quiet indifference.

As they wended their way out, the two encountered Mrs. Burleigh, Miss Sherman, and Mr. Clairmont engaged in conversation.

"Mrs. Clairmont," said Mrs. Burleigh, who looked very pretty, detaining Helene a moment, "I think your husband here possesses a most magnificent voice. If he were mine I should make him sing for me all the time."

"Indeed, his voice is a truly grand one and

you should certainly be proud of him," added Miss Sherman enthusiastically.

"You most assuredly should be," rejoined Mrs. Burleigh. Then she continued, "I think it is perfectly lovely for a wife to accompany her husband. I wish my husband had a voice so that I could play for him to sing. Two people can spend the evening that way so pleasantly. It is so sweet for them to play and sing together. Don't you think it is, Miss Sherman?"

"Yes, indeed I do," acquiesced that lady.

All the time Helene stood there cold, proud, indifferent. Though her face and throat were bathed in a most burning blush, she exhibited very little, if any, emotion. There was a moment of silence, for she could scarcely speak; then she said in a clear, calm, but low tone, "Mrs. Burleigh, Mr. Clairmont and myself were divorced four years ago."

Both Mrs. Burleigh and Miss Sherman seemed stunned, and crimsoned violently. At last that voluble young married woman had discovered why Helene had hesitated about obliging Miss Foster.

Mr. Clairmont stood leaning against the door with his arms folded across his breast. Before Helene passed out with Mr. Palmer, their eyes met for a moment. The violet ones then drooped and a deep color again bathed her face and throat. Then she and her escort passed out on the veranda. Mr. Clairmont watched them until they vanished in the dark-

ness outside. He half closed his eyes for an instant and felt that he could still hear that calm voice say again and again, "Mrs. Burleigh, Mr. Clairmont and myself were divorced four years ago." It seemed that the very words, and especially the word "divorced," burned in his brain and in his very soul. The atmosphere of the room seemed so close and hot that he felt he would almost suffocate, so he, too, went out on the veranda.

Helene was so sitting that she recognized him as he emerged from the doorway, for the light from the room had fallen full upon him. She noticed, too, that he seated himself not far distant from her, though perhaps he was not aware of her nearness. Helene did not hear one word Mr. Palmer uttered, for she felt, nervous, wearied and abstracted. She was very glad when he was summoned to escort his aunt, Mrs. Foster, to her villa. On rising, he pleaded with her to remain until he returned, telling her that he would be absent only a few minutes. She reluctantly consented.

When Mr. Palmer was gone, Helene rose from her seat, leaned heavily against the iron railing and thought how sweet it was to be alone. As she stood there thinking of her past life and gazing up at the numberless stars that shone so bright and beautiful, yet seemed colder and more silent than usual, she suddenly became aware that some one was standing beside her. A violent agitation

seized her and she rested her clasped hands against the iron baluster.

The person beside her spoke: "Mrs. Clairmont, I wish to thank you for playing my accompaniment this evening."

"It is not necessary to thank me, Mr. Clairmont," Helene returned coldly but proudly.

He said no more, but looked up at the great, cold, silent stars shining far away, and thought of the time when he and this woman beside him were friends, nay more than friends or even lovers. He thought how utterly cold and hard she had been to him since their divorce, and especially so since he had come to Crayton. A mad feeling of desperation almost overwhelmed him. For an instant he stood with folded arms, then, thinking to rest his hand upon the railing, he unconsciously placed it upon Helene's clasped ones. She started violently. Reginald Clairmont said nothing, but quietly removed the slender white hands from the resting place, parted them and clasped, nay almost crushed, them in his own. Neither spoke, for they felt that they could not find their own voices; so a long, long silence ensued between them. Helene made frequent and violent efforts to free her hands, but her attempts proved futile, for his grasp, though gentle, was firm and strong.

Finally these two were aroused from their own thoughts by the entrance, on the veran-

da, of two persons who were engaged in conversation and who seated themselves not far distant, every word they uttered being plainly heard by those two who were so near and yet so far from each other. Helene and Reginald immediately recognized the pair by their voices as Miss Foster and Mr. Chelcy.

"Mr. Chelcy," pleaded Miss Foster, "do you really think that Mr. Clairmont is still in love with her?"

"I don't think so, Miss Foster, but I know it," asserted Mr. Chelcy positively. "Clairmont is a man of very deep feelings and he is not one to love lightly. He and I were at college together and I know him well. Before he met her he had never cared for any woman. He used to say to me that he would never marry. Why, he even sneered at the very idea, and said that he regarded marriage as an impediment to his career."

Helene again essayed to withdraw her hands, but could not. She longed so to be alone, to commune with her own heart.

"Then you don't think Mr. Clairmont will ever marry again?"

"No, I am quite sure he will not unless he marry the woman he loves," Mr. Chelcy assented.

"Do you suppose, if there were a reconciliation between them, Mr. Clairmont would then marry her?" inquired Miss Foster somewhat nervously.

"If Mrs. Clairmont consented, he would marry her to-morrow."

"But I thought you said he regarded marriage as an impediment to his career."

"Clairmont made that remark to me before he was ever in love, Miss Foster," continued Mr. Chelcy earnestly. "That man loves Mrs. Clairmont with the very depths of his soul. He never ceased to love her even when she taunted him in public. I have seen him when he was almost desperate and could no longer control his feelings. It was only yesterday that he said to me, 'Chelcy, you do not know, you cannot know, how I have struggled, how I have suffered and what I have suffered. Sometimes I almost go mad when I think of my past life and my life now, of how I loved her and still love her with the very desperation of a man's soul, yet she cares nothing for me and is ever cold, hard, cruel. Chelcy, you do not know, you cannot know what it is to love a woman as I love and to have her to be so hard, so cruel, so utterly heartless. God knows, Chelcy, I hope you will never know what it is to suffer as I have suffered.' Ah, Miss Foster, that man has one of the grandest and noblest of souls."

Helene breathed hard. She staggered and almost fell, but the man beside her quietly but gently and reverently passed his arm about her and drew her to him. For a moment her eyes closed and her head drooped against his shoulder. When she had suf-

ficiently recovered herself, she gently drew herself away from him. Miss Foster and Mr. Chelcy were not aware of the nearness of the two persons under discussion.

"Miss Foster, you can readily see that Clairmont is a man of very deep feelings."

"Yes, I see that he is," she answered in a low voice. "But, Mr. Chelcy," she added, "you would never know it if you did not know him quite so well."

"No, for he conceals his feelings beneath a cold exterior. Have you noticed lately how gloomy and silent he seems?"

"Yes, I have."

"Well, when he, Armour, Kroker, Grey and myself were in college together he was the jolliest fellow of us all. But since he and Mrs. Clairmont have been divorced, and, too, since his father's death, he has not been the same man."

Helene turned away from Mr. Clairmont, but could not withdraw her hands. She longed to move away, but could not do so with impunity.

"Mr. Chelcy, do you think there will ever be a reconciliation between them?" Miss Foster asked after a short pause.

"I do not know, but I hope there will be," Mr. Chelcy replied earnestly. "They are artists; indeed, they are the two greatest stars that scintillate in the theatrical firmament. I wish they would marry," he added in low,

earnest tones, "for they are two people who belong entirely to each other."

"Do you know, Mr. Chelcy," pursued Miss Foster in a lower voice, "I think Mrs. Clairmont is in love with Mr. Clairmont."

"You do think so?"

"Yes, I do. I not only think she is in love with him, but I think she is desperately so and endeavors to conceal it."

"I hope she does care for him," observed Mr. Chelcy, with feeling.

Miss Foster adjusted a light wrap about her shoulders and then said as she rose, "It is a trifle cool and I think I would rather go in."

As they passed, Helene and Reginald heard Miss Foster say, "I know that Mrs. Clairmont is desperately in love with Mr. Clairmont, but she—"

The sentence was not completed, for at that moment the speaker passed within the door and disappeared. Helene longed to know why Miss Foster, whom she did not know intimately, made such assertions, and on what foundations she based them. She wondered if the man beside her believed what Miss Foster had asserted so confidently. She hoped he did not. These two had not spoken since that confidential young woman had taken her departure. Helene knew from the previous conversation that Mr. Clairmont was not engaged to Miss Foster. She felt that he did not care for her, but that he was

really in love with Matille. Nothing could induce her to believe that he cared for her, since she had been so hard, so unfeeling to him. Though she had a moment ago heard Mr. Chelcy say that Reginald loved her, still she could not and would not believe it, though she longed to do so with all her soul.

Mr. Clairmont, too, refused to credit what he had heard Miss Foster aver. He argued that if Helene cared for him she would not be so utterly cold and cruel to him. For a moment he almost crushed the slender, white hands he held, then Helene withdrew them and said, in a low but very nervous voice, "Let us go. I feel so very, very tired."

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CHAPTER XV

AN OBTRUDER

It was the evening following that of Miss Foster's musicale and all the younger members of the Kroker household were assembled in the drawing room. Helene sat there, resting her elbow upon a table and her cheek upon her hand. She felt wearied and depressed and suffered from a dull headache. Grace, however, was talking volubly with the others.

"By the way, Clairmont, did you know that Grey was here?" inquired Gerald with a smile.

"No, when did he come?"

"Late this afternoon. I happened to be in the St. Charles Hotel when he came in. He said he wanted to have a chat with us all, such as we used to have at college."

"The only times I chance to see him," said Mr. Clairmont, "are when I am playing in Boston. He, you know, rarely, if ever, visits New York."

"Yes, I know," returned Gerald.

"He told me once that he did not care for New York," remarked Harold.

"That proves it, then, since he never visits the city," laughed Gerald.

"Harold, who is this Mr. Grey?" queried Grace.

"Grace," said Mr. Clairmont, before Harold could vouchsafe a reply. "Grey is a dear old friend of ours. He was in college at the same time we were and belonged to our clique."

"Won't it seem like college days with all five of us here," smiled Gerald.

"That it will," answered Harold.

"Is he very jolly?" asked Grace.

"He used to be," replied Harold, "but I do not know how he is now."

"I hope I shall like him," mused Grace.

"I hope you will," returned Mr. Clairmont warmly. Then he remarked, smiling pleasantly, "Armour, if you find that she likes him a good deal, you must not let her see very much of him."

"Now, Reginald, you must not say such things," reproached Grace, blushing and endeavoring to pout.

"O, you need not pout, Grace," laughed Mr. Clairmont. "We shall soon be friends again."

"I have implicit confidence in her," said Harold, with a tender light in his dark eyes.

"Thank you, Harold," smiled Grace, blushing prettily.

"Suppose we go over to the St. Charles now," suggested Gerald.

"Well, suppose we do," acquiesced Harold. "Grace, you had better get your light wrap."

"I will," she answered. Then approaching Helene, she said, "Helene, aren't you going with us?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not care to go," Helene answered wearily and with indifference.

"Helene, I have never seen anybody like you," said Grace testily. "You never want to go anywhere."

"I feel tired and have a headache," was the answer.

"I am sorry you won't go with us," remarked Grace.

"Helene, I think it is a perfect shame for you to remain here all alone the entire evening," objected Harold. "Clairmont, I appeal to you; cannot you prevail upon her to go?"

Helene colored violently, but remained rigidly silent.

"I am afraid not, Armour," replied Mr. Clairmont. "Any inducement I might offer would avail nothing," he added with a forced laugh, and turned abruptly away.

Helene ventured no answer, but sat quiet and indifferent. Never before in all her life, it seemed to her, had she felt so wretchedly unhappy as she did now. She wished that Reginald Clairmont had never come to Crayton. She looked down at the roses, so fair and fresh, nestling at her breast, and thought

how untroubled they were. They were flowers sent by the unknown friend. Grace soon returned with her wrap. She, Gerald, and Harold, after expressing their regrets to Helene, were passing out of the door, when Mr. Clairmont said, "Armour, please don't wait for me. I shall be there shortly."

"Very well," Harold answered, and the three left the villa.

Mr. Clairmont had lingered to have a few words with Helene before going to the St. Charles Hotel. He felt worried and wretchedly unhappy. He bent down and said quietly, in deep, musical tones, "Helene, are you not going over to the hotel this evening?"

"No, I do not care to go."

"Why not?"

"Because I feel tired," she answered wearily. Helene felt that if she went Mr. Clairmont would, of course, be with Miss Foster, and she would be forced to talk to Mr. Brosk, Mr. Palmer, and many others, all of whom were pleasant, but in whom she was not especially interested.

"Won't you go if I ask it?" he pleaded earnestly.

"No, not if you ask it," she answered sadly.

"Not for my sake, Helene?"

"No, not even for your sake," she replied slowly, averting her face.

"No inducement I might offer would persuade you?" he said sorrowfully, bending lower down.

"No, nothing, she answered coldly.

"I knew it," he answered bitterly, standing erect. "I have always known," he added, with harsh bitterness, "that anything I said or did would not influence Mrs. Clairmont one iota."

"Then if Mr. Clairmont were aware of that fact, why should he endeavor to persuade me to go against my wishes?"

Mr. Clairmont only bit his lip in reply. Then after a short pause he said in slightly sneering tones, "I presume Mrs. Clairmont would rather I did not intrude further upon her presence."

"I would much rather that Mr. Clairmont enjoyed a pleasant evening in conversation with his old college friend Mr. Grey," she returned, with chilling sarcasm.

"Good-night, Mrs. Clairmont. I wish you a most pleasant evening."

"Thank you. I wish you the same."

"Good-night."

When he had gone she buried her face in her hands, but did not weep. No, she would not shed a tear; she did not and would not care if he loved Miss Foster, if he worshiped her with the very depths of his soul. Long, long she sat there. She heard the great clock in the hall chime the hour of eleven, then the half hour, but still she did not move. She

was so absorbed in her own thoughts and feelings that she did not hear some one enter the room through one of the open windows. At last she became conscious that some one was near, and, looking up, recognized Lance standing beside her. For a full moment she seemed almost stunned, then, rising to her full height and retreating some distance from this man, who was impregnated with the odor of strong drink, demanded in cold, proud tones: "Mr. Lance, why do you intrude upon my presence? Why do you persist in following me to cruelly insult me?"

Lance did not move, but said, in as gentle tones as he knew how to command, "God knows, Helene, I have not come this time to insult you. I have come to ask you to be my wife; to tell you that I love you above everything else in the world and to say that I will abandon my old habits if you will return my love and become my wife. I swear if you do all this I will do everything in my power to make you happy."

Helene was very white, and leaned heavily against a chair. For a moment she eyed the man before her with withering contempt, as he stood there with face flushed and bloated, eyes glittering with a sort of dull, fierce light hair dishevelled and arms extended. She almost laughed at the idea of such a man addressing her or any other decent woman. Indeed, it was perfect effrontery on his part.

"Mr. Lance," she said, with calm contempt, entirely ignoring his pleading, "I shall esteem it a favor if you will leave me."

At first he was a little ruffled at this, but then he thought it would be best to remain cool and not succumb to his feelings, so he kept calm, for he felt that, by a little patience, the victory in the end would be his.

"Helene," he began again, slightly approaching her, "you are unkind, nay, cruel, to order me away like this but nevertheless I shall not, in the slightest degree, let your harshness prevent me from saying what I will. The first time I saw you, I loved you; even after Clairmont had married you I loved you, and now, since you are a free woman, I love you still."

"Mr. Lance," she returned, flushing with anger, "I will listen to no more of this. Either you or I will have to leave the room," and she moved in the direction of the door; but he was too quick for her, having reached, closed, and bolted it before she could take another step. Then he proceeded to close the windows.

"Will you so basely ignore a lady's wishes?" she demanded, with intense scorn.

"Will you vilely insult a man in your own house?" he inquired with a laugh.

"If you were a gentleman, you would leave me and not persist in remaining and, too, you would not close the door and windows."

"If you were a lady, you would not bid me leave your own house and refuse to listen to me."

What could she do, now that the door and windows were closed, for there was no egress, and if she screamed or attempted to call for help this man would do violence to her or perhaps murder her? Why had she not gone to the hotel? Why had she persisted in remaining there all alone? And above all, why had she been so utterly unfeeling to Mr. Clairmont, after all his kindness, and almost driven him from her presence? Her heart almost sickened at her position. She could not call, for no one could hear her. There she was, in the clutches of this man, who was very nearly beastly drunk. She could detect the odor of strong drink on his breath whenever he approached her.

For a full minute the room seemed to whirl round and round, and she felt as if she were going to faint. Then she suddenly recovered herself and remembered that she was not alone, but the man whom she despised, nay, loathed, most of all was in the room and very near her. She saw clearly that the only course to pursue was to promise to listen to him if he would open the door and windows. She was very white, for she felt that she was at this man's mercy and she felt, too, that in order to effect an escape she must make some concession.

"Mr. Lance, will you please open the door and windows?" she asked coldly.

"I will if you will promise to listen to me and will not attempt to escape."

"I promise."

"Will you swear it?" he asked eagerly.

"Cannot you take me at my word?" she questioned, with proud contempt.

"Forgive me, Helene, I did not mean to doubt you. You promise, then, that you will hear me and not attempt to escape?" he inquired with great eagerness, leaning slightly toward her.

She retreated a few steps and then answered, "Yes, I promise."

He then opened the door and windows.

"You will hear me now?"

Helene bowed coldly. She wished some one would come. Oh, if Reginald would only come and rescue her from this man!

Lance eyed her closely. Then he began in a quiet tone: "Helene, I have always loved you and I love you still. The man you married cared nothing whatever for you and he most assuredly cares nothing whatever for you now. He was a brute to you and made a hideous beast of himself. He is a man not worthy of any good woman's love or even her respect. He is more vile than the vilest of—"

"I did not promise to hear you abuse Mr. Clairmont," she said with freezing contempt.

"I beg your pardon if I wounded your feelings. I was only telling you the truth about

him. He is nothing more than a horrible reprobate."

"I will not listen to you if you talk like this," she asserted proudly drawing herself up to her full height.

"You still love him, then?" he almost growled, his face flushing with uncontrollable anger.

"No, I do not love Mr. Clairmont," she returned proudly, "but I consider him one of my best friends."

Lance said nothing, but quietly drew forth a small unloaded, silver-mounted pistol and laid it upon a little onyx and gold stand. He had brought with him two pistols, one with which to defend himself in case any one interfered, and the small unloaded one with which to menace and frighten the woman before him if she proved in the least refractory. When she saw the weapon she winced slightly, but vouchsafed no remark. At first the sight of it frightened her, but then she determined to be calm and to hold her own, no matter what the result might be.

"Helene, will you come with me now? Will you be my wife?" queried Lance coaxingly.

"No, I cannot."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not love you, that is all."

"Why cannot you love me?" he demanded, his eyes blazing with rage, and advancing boldly up to her with the small weapon in his

hand. She did not know that it was unloaded. Though very pallid, she stood cool and deliberate and faced him with unwavering intrepidity. He retreated a step, struck dumb with admiration for her fearlessness.

"Coward that you are to thus attempt to intimidate a woman!" she said with fine scorn.

"Helene, I want you for my wife. I ask you to forgive the past and to come with me. Leonard is waiting for me in the shadow of the portico. He and I arrived here late this afternoon and after dinner we directed our footsteps toward the Kroker villa. We waited in the shadow until every one, except you, had left the house and after the lapse of a very long time I crept in here and saw you with your face buried in your hands. I saw that beast Clairmont bend over you and I heard him endeavoring to persuade you to spend the evening at the St. Charles Hotel and your refusal to acquiesce to his wishes. I noticed that you were positively freezing to him. However, that odious wretch does not concern me. Helene, will you come with me?"

"No, I will not," she replied with perfect coldness.

"Do you still love that dastardly scoundrel!" he demanded fiercely, grasping her roughly by the arm.

"How dare you speak of him like that!" she cried, making violent efforts to free her

arm; but she could not, for his grasp tightened as if it were a band of steel. Then, fearing that she might in some way elude him he returned the weapon to the stand, passed his arm about her and drew her tightly to him. She gave two screams and was prevented from uttering a third by his roughly placing his hand over her mouth. She felt as if she would strangle and faint away.

"Now you will come with me, my proud young woman!" he whispered hoarsely, removing his hand so as to enable her to answer.

"No, never," she replied firmly.

"Then if you do not, I will kill you," he hissed, slowly inclining his head. She could feel his hot breath against her face, and it sickened her.

"Do you think," she demanded hoarsely, "that brute force will gain a woman's love?"

"No matter what means I employ to gain you, for I am determined to possess you, and nobody shall prevent me if he values his life," he hissed triumphantly.

She again essayed violently to extricate herself, but attempts proved futile. Helene was so unnerved that she could scarcely stand. Her eyes closed and at last she felt she must utterly succumb to her own feelings. Lance, who stood with his back to the door, was in the act of pressing his lips to those of the woman he held, when he received a most

powerful blow at the back of his head, which fairly stunned him for a moment, and caused him to loose his hold.

"Infernal dastard!" exclaimed Mr. Clairmont with intense rage. He longed to use stronger language, but there was Helene, the only woman he had ever loved, and whom he loved above all others. She staggered and would have fallen had not he reached her in time to catch her in his arms. He placed her upon a divan and stood looking down at her as she lay so white and still. She had not fainted, but was too entirely unnerved to utter a sound. He then turned his attention to Lance, who seemed thoroughly dazed, and had not yet recovered from the vigorous blow he had received.

"Infamous scoundrel, what brought you here?" Mr. Clairmont demanded fiercely, facing the intoxicated man.

"None of your infernal business," growled Lance, who being a coward, trembled violently. He ground his teeth at the thought of having gained so much and then having lost it all. "I will kill you for this," he hissed, after a slight pause.

Helene, who had somewhat recovered herself, now approached Mr. Clairmont. She was still very white and her long, blue-black hair, which had become loosed, fell like a veil of night over her delicate shoulders and the white mist of her gown.

"Reginald," she pleaded in a low but very nervous voice, laying her hand upon his arm, "now that you have rescued me from this man, please let him go."

"No, Helene," he returned in a sort of tense voice; "I intend to kill him and, too, on this very night, if it take my very last breath."

"We'll see about that," growled Lance, biting his lip.

"Helene, leave the room at once and let me have done with this fellow," commanded Mr. Clairmont hoarsely.

"I shall remain here," she returned proudly.

"Do as I bid you!" he exclaimed fiercely.

"I will not," she answered, as proudly as before. As she stood there, so calm, with her blue-black hair falling all about her, never had the two men seen her look so cold, so regal, so beautiful. Mr. Clairmont vouchsafed not another word, but went up to Helene, took her hand firmly in his and was in the act of compelling her to follow him, when Gerald and Harold rushed excitedly into the room.

"What is all this about?" they both cried in one breath.

"Kroker, please lead Mrs. Clairmont from the room, and when you return I shall explain everything," said Reginald huskily.

"What are you doing here, you dastardly beast?" Harold Armour demanded fiercely of Lance.

"None of your infernal business," replied the other gruffly.

"Armour, leave this dogged fellow to me. I will settle with him as soon as Kroker conducts this obstinate young woman out of our presence," said Reginald, somewhat angrily. Gerald approached his cousin.

"Gerald, do not touch me," she commanded haughtily. "I intend to remain right where I am."

All saw that persuasion was to no purpose and that this proud woman had determined upon her own course, so they desisted in any attempts to lead her away.

For a moment the two men, Lance and Clairmont, faced each other; then they grappled and suddenly became locked in each other's arms. The two swayed furiously back and forth and seemed utterly unconscious of the presence of others. Once Reginald's foot slipped and once Lance almost fell, and under his breath he uttered a fierce oath. For a while the two men writhed as if in mortal agony, Lance breathing heavily and muttering oath after oath; Clairmont grinding hard his teeth in his under lip. Long, long they wrestled thus.

Suddenly, when Lance, who had managed to extricate one arm, was about to secure the other pistol, which was loaded and which he had concealed in one of his back pockets of his trousers, his antagonist, grappling him by the throat and almost strangling him, hurled

him with powerful force to the floor. There was a loud report. The falling of Lance had caused the explosion of the weapon he had nervously endeavored to secure. The discharge of it, however, instantly killed Lance, and the three men coolly and quietly looked down upon him as he lay there so still, glaring up at them with glassy eyes. Blood trickled from his nostrils and out of the corners of his mouth. When, after a sort of lull, Helene realized what had occurred, she sank white and greatly agitated upon a divan. During the entire scene, though very pallid, she had remained rigidly composed.

When Leonard, Lance's intimate associate, heard the loud report, he crept from his concealment in the shadow of the portico to the window to ascertain what had happened. As the sight met his gaze his face became deathly pale and a violent agitation took possession of him. Realizing that it would be best for him not to linger, he fled precipitately.

Percival was summoned and the dead man was at once removed. Everything was soon put to rights and the usual peace and quiet restored. Janet then came in, bathed Helene's face and braided the long blue-black hair.

"Well, I suppose Lance has now gone to the antipodes," remarked Mr. Clairmont, with a laugh, after the maid had retired.

"Why do you say antipodes?" inquired Harold.

"Well, the day before I left New York I encountered this fellow on Broadway and he informed me that he and Leonard intended to sail the next day for the antipodes, as he expressed it. I think he said they were going to some place in Australia."

"Perhaps," laughed Gerald, "he has not journeyed to the antipodes, but is now in Hades. I wonder if Charon were willing to ferry such a wretch across the Acheron and finally over the Styx?"

"I can imagine that he had a time with Lance," Harold replied with a laugh.

"Clairmont," asked Gerald after a slight pause, "how did you happen to know the scoundrel was here?"

"I was sitting out on the veranda of the St. Charles," began Reginald, "engaged in conversation with Grey and Miss Foster, when I heard some one, very near me, calling very excitedly for me. I hastily excused myself and went hurriedly to the person who had called to me. I discovered her to be Janet. The girl was very excited and gesticulated wildly. I inquired what was the matter and she told me, in a hysterical sort of way, that a man was insulting Mrs. Clairmont. Of course, after hearing that, I hurried as quickly as I could, and when I reached here I found the villain cruelly maltreating her"

Mr. Clairmont did not care to tell them that when he arrived on the scene Lance was tightly holding Helene in his arms and in the very act of touching his foul lips to hers. Though Reginald felt that Helene was exceedingly cruel and hard to him, yet he cherished a most reverential respect for her feelings.

"The dastard!" exclaimed Harold.

"The implacable villain!" growled Gerald.

Helene, meanwhile, gazed at the three men before her as she sat quietly there upon the divan. Her eyes, replete with intense gratitude, then turned to her protector. As they rested upon the man who had rescued her from the clutches of Lance, her heart gave one bound of joy, at the same time, ached with an almost unendurable pain. She rose queenlike in her gown of filmy whiteness and said in a low voice quivering with deep emotion: "I can never, as long as I live, thank you enough, Mr. Clairmont, for what you have done this evening and those great kindnesses you rendered me in the past. God knows I thank you from the very depths of my soul."

The three men were now standing and Mr. Clairmont stood facing the woman who had addressed him.

"Mrs. Clairmont," he said, "you need not and must not thank me. I did only that which was clearly my duty, that which any man, who is not devoid of a heart and a soul,

would have done. I beg you not to thank me, for I deserve no gratitude. I did only my duty."

How, Helene thought, could Miss Foster help returning the love of this man, this man who was so grand, so true, so noble! She felt a sickening sensation steal over her and if she were going to faint, but then she quickly recovered herself and said in an agitated voice: "I shall say good-night, for it is quite late, and I feel very, very tired."

Helene longed to be in the seclusion of her own room and to commune with her own heart, so she bade them good-night and left the room in great agitation.

Harold and Gerald then repaired to the St. Charles for Grace and Myriam, leaving Reginald Clairmont entirely alone. He sank into a chair and, resting his elbows upon a table, buried his face in his hands. He felt that Helene and the dramatic art, once two lights soft, tender, mellow yet sublimely beautiful, burned in and illumined his soul; but now, since their divorce, one of these bright lights, it seemed, had been extinguished and left the heart, the beautiful crystal grotto of the sorrows and affections, dark, dreary and desolate forever and forever.

CHAPTER XVI

AMONG THE MORNING-GLORIES

It was several days before Helene recovered from the shock of the terrible tragedy of that night and was herself again. When the rest of the household heard all about it, they were very nervous and very much wrought up over it for a day or two, but after that everything resumed its usual state.

One morning, about a week after that night of the deplorable catastrophe, Helene came down to breakfast looking very fresh and lovely. All were seated at the table except Mr. Clairmont, whose chair was vacant beside her. He had frequently been invited to luncheon and dinner since his arrival at Crayton, but never had he been asked to breakfast. Helene wondered why he was not there. What was the matter? Had he been invited to breakfast with some one? Was he ill? She longed to inquire the cause of his absence, but desisted. She thought it best not to make any inquiries, as she had, for the last four years, announced most positively and most emphatically, that she cared nothing whatever for him, and that she was not in the least interested in him, except in a

professional way. For a long time she sat rigidly silent, and all, especially Gerald, Harold, and Grace, noticed that she was becoming a trifle nervous and anxious.

"What is the matter, Helene?" queried Grace, with a smile.

"Nothing," answered Helene, with forced indifference.

"Yes, there, is, too, for you look nervous," laughed Gerald. Mr. and Mrs. Krocker and Mrs. Balfour only smiled.

"What has happened?" tantalized Grace.

"Nothing that I know of," was the quietly indifferent reply.

Then Gerald said, with a smile, "Helene, we won't tease you any longer. Clairmont left a little over an hour ago for New York."

"Why did he go?" she asked simply.

"It was a business call. Then, too, Manlyn wanted to see him about the play you and he are going to produce this coming season. Clairmont said he would be absent perhaps a week and he was sure not more. To-day is Wednesday and he will probably not return before next Wednesday. All I know is, I am very sorry that he was compelled to go."

"I am dreadfully sorry, too," echoed Grace.

"He is always so genial and courteous to everybody."

"Yes, he is," assented Harold earnestly.

"I sincerely hope he will hasten his return."

"So do I," acquiesced Mrs. Kroker. Then she added, "We all deeply deplore his having to be absent a single day."

As the days passed, one by one, every member of the Kroker household missed Mr. Clairmont, and to Helene there seemed to be an aching void. She walked, drove, danced, sang a little, and even essayed to enjoy golf and other out-door sports, but all to no purpose. Try as she would, she could not be gay and happy. She missed him terribly. He had always been so courteous to her and now, as she thought of all his kindness, she upbraided herself for her coldness and harshness to him. She determined that when he returned, if he wished it, she would extend to him that friendship which she had once refused him, and she determined, too, that she would ask him to forgive her all her cruel harshness and deep unkindness to him, no matter what the result might be. She would give him her friendship regardless of all circumstances. Though she essayed to the utmost to be happy, yet she could not, for each day that followed seemed to drag more slowly and heavily upon her.

At last Tuesday evening arrived. Mr. Clairmont had been absent nearly a week, his return not being expected until on the morrow. On this particular evening, however, Grace, Helene, and Myriam Chelcy were seated near a table in the drawing-room. Myriam had been invited to dine at the Kro-

ker's, and after dinner Harold and Gerald betook themselves to the St. Charles Hotel to enjoy a short chat with Egerton Grey before the dance, leaving the three to their own diversion.

Miss Chelcy was attired in delicate cream, Grace looked lovely in pale blue, while Helene was becomingly gowned in a white silk mull that was soft, clinging, diaphonous, and like some gossamer white cloud floating far away in the blue ether. She was partial to white—first, because it was very becoming to her and she liked it; and, second, because some one liked it and always wanted to see her wear it. In her hair, which was arranged pompadour, were a few white carnations, and nestling at her breast was a bunch of the same choice flowers, whose delicate but spicy fragrance perfumed every part of the room. She sat leaning her elbows upon the table and with her chin resting upon her clasped hands. She seemed colder than usual and, too, seemed to be in a thoroughly abstracted mood. For a long time she had been thus, even while Grace and Myriam were engaged in a most lively conversation. At last she was awakened from her own thoughts by Miss Chelcy addressing her.

"Helene, tell me," said that young lady, leaning forward on the table, "don't you miss Mr. Clairmont?"

"Why do you ask?" inquired Helene, coloring deeply.

"Because he is such a genial man and always so lovely to everybody, and because, too, you seem sadder and more abstracted than I have ever known you. You do miss him, now, don't you?"

"At first I did, because he sits near me at the table, but now I do not.

"Ah, I knew you did," laughed Myriam. Then, changing her tone of voice, said earnestly, "Helene, if I ask you something will you tell me?"

"That depends," was the indifferent reply.

"Won't you tell me if I ask it?"

"What is it?"

"Helene, I think you might. You know I am one of your best, if not the best, friend, and you know, too, that I expect to be related to you in the autumn."

"What is it that you wish me to reveal to you, Myriam?"

"Helene, don't you love him still?"

"Love whom still?" Helene asked, coloring deeply and studying the grain of wood in the mahogany table upon which she leaned.

"You know very well whom I mean. It is Mr. Clairmont, of course. Whom else should I mean?"

Helene's color deepened and she became greatly agitated. "Myriam, why do you ask me such a question?" she demanded in a low voice, her breath coming and going more quickly, and still resting her eyes on the table before her. "Why do you inflict such a ques-

tion?" she queried, somewhat nervously, "when you know that for nearly three years we did not recognize each other and only this last year have we barely spoken? Could you still love a man who had insulted you? I know that a woman's love is far deeper, stronger, and more lasting than a man's, yet if it be all that, it cannot be ignored, trampled in the dirt by receiving insults and meeting with unremitting hardness. No, Myriam, I do not love him."

"He is a vastly different man now from what he was four years ago."

"I know he is," came in low tones.

"Helene," resumed Miss Chelcy earnestly, "let me tell you something. If you continue your coldness and harshness to Mr. Clairmont, he really will fall in love with Matille Foster."

"I do not think he will do so, but I know he has already done so."

"Why, Helene!" said Miss Chelcy in reproachful tones. "Are you so blind that you cannot see he loves you with the very depth of his soul? Why, the very fact of your being a woman should tell you that. It is as plain as day, for everybody sees and knows it. If you are not aware of it, then you are about the only woman who cannot discover when a man is in love with you. Why do you labor under the impression that he is in love with Matille?"

"I heard from good authority that he and she were engaged."

"That is all perfect nonsense. He may admire her, but that is all. But I say this, if you do not cease your cruel hardness and chilling coldness to him he will, perhaps, give his heart to Matille. You know she is desperately in love with him."

"Is she?"

"Yes, indeed she is."

There was a short silence. Helene's bosom rose and fell quickly and her face still wore the same delicate tint.

"Helene, please tell me, I think you might," pleaded Myriam.

"Tell you what, Myriam?" came in a low, unsteady voice.

"If you do not still love Mr. Clairmont. Though you deny it, I do not believe you. I don't see why you object to my knowing."

"Myriam, if ever I am in love you shall most assuredly know it."

"I don't believe you have any confidence in me, Helene, or you would not refuse to unfold the truth to me. You know full well that any secret you reposed in me would be perfectly safe."

"Yes, I know that."

"Then why do you distrust me?" queried Myriam in injured tones.

"Myriam, I do not distrust you," returned Helene, rising and leaning heavily against the chair she had vacated, with her back facing

the door. "Some other time I will tell you," she added nervously, "do not press me now."

"Why wait until some other time?"

"Because I prefer it."

"Helene, I know you love him, or you would not answer as you do. Don't you think she does, Grace?"

"I do not know. I shall have to refer you to Helene," returned Grace simply, quietly opening and closing an exquisite evening fan.

"Then are you afraid to trust me?"

"No, dear, I am not," Helene answered earnestly in a low, unsteady voice.

"If you had confidence in me you would not withhold the truth. I know one thing, if Matille once thought or knew that he returned her love, she would be only too proud to reveal it. She would marry him to-morrow if he were here and asked her. Indeed, he could marry any one whom he wished."

"Do you really think so?"

"I don't think so, but I know it," asserted Miss Chelcy. "No woman deserves his love not even you, Helene, for you have been so cruel, so hard, and so unfeeling to him."

"Believe me, Myriam," said Helene sadly, "some other time I will unfold all to you."

"I am very sorry indeed that you cannot trust me," said Myriam reproachfully, toying with her lace handkerchief.

"Who is it that distrusts you, Miss Myriam?" inquired Mr. Clairmont, who at that

juncture entered the room and approached the table where they were.

For a moment all three seemed dumb for he had arrived a day earlier than expected. After the expressions of surprise had ceased, he shook hands with Grace and Myriam, who greeted him most cordially. Helene was very nervous and agitated and a wave of deep color passed over her face. She and Mr. Clairmont merely bowed.

"Miss Myriam, may I ask who it is that refuses you their confidence?" he inquired with a smile slightly tinged with sadness, as he stood beside Helene with his arms folded and resting upon the back of a chair.

"It is Helene, Mr. Clairmont."

He directed his glance toward the proud, queenly woman so near him. For an instant the two looked straight into each other's eyes. The violet ones then drooped before the intensely burning gaze of the deep, dark depths.

"Will Mrs. Clairmont shake hands with me?" he asked in deep, earnest tones.

She only answered by unconsciously placing her left hand in the one he extended. An exquisitely sweet thrill electrified them both as he closed his hand over and pressed tightly and passionately the one he held. Helene trembled violently and a deep glow overspread her face and throat.

"Now, Miss Myriam, tell me why you think Mrs. Clairmont distrusts you," resumed Reg-

in a faint smile irradiating his features as he still held the slender white hand in his.

"Mr. Clairmont, I wanted so much to know something," said Myriam smiling and blushing, "and Helene would not tell me."

"What is it you are so anxious to know? Perhaps I can enlighten you."

"O, no, you can not."

"Try me and see."

"I am quite sure you can not."

"I am about to be convinced that a certain young woman distrusts me altogether," observed Mr. Clairmont quietly. Helene gently withdrew her hand. She felt greatly oppressed.

"No, I don't."

"Then tell me what it is you wish to know."

"I feel sure it is true, though Helene denies it," returned Myriam somewhat evasively.

"How do you know it is true?"

"Because her face confirms what her lips deny."

"And you feel that she has positively told an untruth."

"Yes."

He looked at Helene, who though coloring violently, was grave, proud, yet sad.

"Suppose," he suggested, "you repeat to me your question and her answer, then I will decide if any fibs have been told."

Myriam hesitated.

"I am waiting," he observed quietly.

After another moment of hesitation she said, somewhat shyly, "Mr. Clairmont, I asked Helene if she still—"

"Myriam!" interrupted a low, unsteady voice.

That was all that was said. Myriam flushed very deeply and said, "Mr. Clairmont, I shall have to refer you to Helene."

Helene, however, was so agitated that she resumed her seat, leaning her elbows upon the table, rested her forehead upon her clasped hands so that he could not see her face. Mr. Clairmont remained standing beside her, still resting his folded arms on the back of a chair. He looked down at the woman he loved and asked, "Helene, won't you repeat to me Miss Myriam's question and your answer so that I can assure her of your utmost trust."

She looked up into the face of the man beside her and answered quietly, "Mr. Clairmont, because I refuse to comply with your request you will not think I distrust you, too?"

"Yes, I shall," he replied earnestly, leaning forward and gazing yearningly into the shadowy, violet eyes which immediately fell beneath his. A thrill of exquisite happiness pervaded her soul, now that he had returned and was beside her. She determined to give him her friendship, nay more, her love and her life. Would he wish it after all her cruel

hardness to him? At that thought a great pain obtruded itself in her heart.

"Though I must refuse you, yet I implore you will not, for one moment, entertain such an idea."

"Helene, I shall feel very much hurt if you do not confide to me Miss Myriam's question and your answer," he pleaded in low tones.

Her voice faltered with deep emotion as she said, "Please, please, I implore you, not to feel so. It pains me to refuse you, but I must disoblige you this once."

"Grace, let me appeal to you."

"Reginald, you look to me in vain. I shall remain neutral; and you, Myriam, and Helene, must decide it among yourselves," Grace answered with a smile.

At this juncture Gerald and Harold entered. They were surprised and greatly delighted to see their friend.

"Hello, old friend," they both cried, greeting Reginald with a most friendly slap on each shoulder.

"Hello, both of you," responded Mr. Clairmont with equal warmth.

"I am very happy to know that you were not compelled to remain away from us the entire week," said Gerald.

"I am just as happy over it as you."

"We have just enjoyed a very pleasant chat with Grey," remarked Harold in jubilant tones.

"Have you? I wish I could have participated in that pleasure. How is the old fellow and how, too, have all of you been during my absence?"

"Everybody, with the exception of one, has been in a most hilarious mood and feeling that life is a great and glorious thing," smiled Gerald.

"Who is that pessimist?" queried Mr. Clairmont, with a shadow of a smile.

"Can't you imagine who it is?" asked Myriam.

"No, Miss Myriam, I cannot. I have not the remotest idea who it is."

"We will leave him to his own conjecture and perhaps he will discover for himself," observed Harold.

"Armour, I think it is unkind of you and Miss Myriam not to tell me where the joke comes in, if there be a joke."

"Suppose we change the subject," suggested Gerald. "Clairmont, whom did you see while you were gone?"

"I saw Manlyn, of course, and I saw, too, as I passed down Broadway one day, Leonard. He still bears me the old grudge. He seems utterly lost without his old associate Lance."

As he recalled the latter's name a shadow seemed to cloud Mr. Clairmont's brow, but it was quickly dispelled. Helene became very white and clasped her hands together so tightly that they were almost clenched.

"Helene, there is no need for alarm, since Mr. Clairmont is here alive and well," reassured Myriam tenderly. Helene vouchsafed no reply, but crimsoned violently.

"You and Leonard did not engage in a duel, I hope," laughed Harold.

"O, no," returned Reginald promptly. "He is more of a coward than his villainous comrade ever was. He informed me that he intended leaving next week for Australia."

"Going to the antipodes, I suppose," laughed Gerald.

"Yes, I suppose so. I am truly glad he is going."

"So am I," echoed Gerald. "I think that such people are a nuisance."

"They most assuredly are," laughed Mr. Clairmont.

There was a slight pause. Then Gerald announced, "There is to be an impromptu dance at the St. Charles this evening, and as it is after ten, suppose we go over and enjoy it."

"I prefer to remain here," said Helene quietly.

"I have never seen anybody like you, Helene," said Grace reproachfully. "You never care to do anything or to go anywhere."

"Even if you do not dance you will enjoy being at the hotel," pleaded Myriam.

All urged and implored, but to no avail. While Grace was absent to get some light wraps, Harold said, with a smile, "Clairmont,

would you really like to know who that person is who has not found life so sweet as we have and whom you, a few moments ago, styled a pessimist?"

"Yes, indeed I should."

"First, let me inform you that somebody missed you terribly and, while you were away, suffered from a most deplorable case of the blues."

"I am delighted to know that some one missed me," smiled Mr. Clairmont, "but I am truly sorry that my absence should have caused any one to suffer from an attack of the blues."

"Well, that is the person," smiled Harold, "who seemed so utterly indifferent to all pleasure."

"Now, Armour, tell me the name of that person."

"Clairmont," said Harold, ignoring the answer, "aren't you going with us to the hotel?"

"No, I shall remain here."

"Reginald, why aren't you going?" pleaded Grace, who had a moment before entered the room.

"Because, Grace, I feel fatigued from traveling."

"Please go. It is so foolish for you to remain here. The evening will be so horribly stupid for you," insisted Gerald.

Would it seem dull to him? Of course it would not, since Helene would be there.

"Thank you all for wishing me to go, but I shall have to forego the pleasure. I am quite sure I should enjoy the evening most thoroughly. Tell Grey I want to have a chat with him to-morrow.

"All right," replied Gerald.

"Well, since you won't go," smiled Harold, "she will tell you all about how she missed you."

Helene rose and leaned heavily against the mahogany table. Her breathing was rapid and her color came and went quickly.

"Yes," assured Myriam in a low voice, "she will tell you all about it. Helene missed you terribly."

In a moment more they were gone, leaving Helene and Mr. Clairmont quite alone. She crossed the room to the window, drew aside the curtain and gazed wistfully out into the night and up at the numberless bright stars emitting their shimmering light from afar. Though she was happy over his return, yet she wished he had gone to the hotel to spend the evening. She felt singularly oppressed and longed to be alone. Mr. Clairmont quietly approached and said in deep, earnest tones, "Helene, did you really miss me?"

She rested her hand on a chair near by and slightly turned away. Her face and throat were bathed in deep color. "Mr. Clairmont," she returned in a low, firm voice, "I did not miss you any more than I would have Gerald or Harold had they been away."

"I am very glad to know that Mrs. Clairmont missed me at all," he affirmed with a slightly ironical smile. Then after a moment he said in a perfectly changed voice, "Helene, I am going to ask you for something, something that you refused me not so very long ago."

"Do you think," she asked in cold, proud tones, not looking at him, "that because I refused you then I shall now readily yield to any wish you might express?"

"Then I am left to infer that Mrs. Clairmont is still inexorable. Therefore I shall not annoy her by upholding any wish of mine," he responded in most freezing tones.

There was a long, embarrassed silence between them. Then Helene raised her deep shadowy eyes and encountered those of Reginald Clairmont resting earnestly and sorrowfully upon her. She clasped her hands and rested them upon the back of a chair. Mr. Clairmont approached, and removing the slender white hands from their resting place almost crushed them within his own. His voice was replete with deep emotion when he said: "Must we always be Mrs. Clairmont and Mr. Clairmont to each other? Why cannot we be Helene and Reginald? Not long ago you denied me your friendship. Will you deny it to me now? Why cannot we be the very best of friends, despite what may happen to either of us?"

A wave of deep color passed over her face and she trembled violently as she answered in a quivering voice: "Mr. Clairmont, in defiance of any circumstances or vicissitudes that may arise, we can and will be the best of friends, but only friends."

"Helene, are you willing to forgive my beastliness?" he asked hoarsely.

"Yes," she answered in a low voice.

"Are you willing to try to forget it all? You know that one cannot forgive unless one forget," he added more hoarsely.

"Since we are to be the best of friends," she returned quietly, "the past is henceforth and forever buried between us."

"Thank God, Helene," he said huskily, "that you are willing to forgive and forget it all and we are to be friends once more and not to meet as strangers nor even as acquaintances."

She did not vouchsafe a reply, for she could not, so a long, sacred silence ensued between them. She yearned to ask him to forgive her all her unkindness and cruel hardness to him, yet she desisted, for she felt that, if he refused, she would not only be debased in her own eyes but she would be utterly condemned by him. As she looked up at him her face turned very white, for she had determined to ask him, regardless of all circumstances.

"Reginald, if I ask you something will you refuse me?" she entreated in an almost ago-

nized voice as she swayed nervously to and fro before him, her hands still held tightly in his.

"What is it, Helene?" he inquired earnestly, a torrent of feelings almost overwhelming his soul.

"Will you," she faltered, "will you forgive all my cruel hardness?" and she bowed her head so that he could not see her face.

"Ah, Helene," he answered in deep, musical tones, his voice shaking with almost overwhelming emotion, "it was cruel of you to try to humiliate and debase me in the eyes of the world. I tried hard to conceal my feelings and God alone will know how it all hurt me. Since you are willing to forgive and forget my beastliness I, too, am willing to forgive and forget it all."

"Oh, Reginald, you are so good! I do not deserve this forgiveness," she said in a pained voice.

"Helene," he returned with great, yearning tenderness, a torrent of feelings again taking possession of him, "since we are the best of friends let us not recall the past. Let us talk about something else. Tell me how you have enjoyed the last few days."

"Well," she said, raising her head and breathing very quickly, "I walked, drove, danced, and even sang a little. This afternoon I went for a drive with Mr. Palmer. He, Mr. Brosk, Mr. Weldon, and your friend Mr. Grey have been exceptionally kind to

me. While I deeply appreciate their kindness yet, do you know, Mr. Clairmont—”

“Helene,” he interrupted, a sad smile playing about his strong, noble mouth, “if we are to be friends are you going to persist in calling me Mr. Clairmont?”

Helene essayed to withdraw her hands, but he only tightened his grasp upon them.

“Well, then Reginald,” she continued nervously, “I was going to say that I had not enjoyed the walks, drives, dances and musicales so very much.”

“Why not?” he asked quietly.

“I do not know,” she faltered slightly.

“Helene, did my absence have anything to do with it?” he queried huskily, as he looked down at the proud, beautiful woman before him.

“Reginald, I did not know that I had promised to be friends with such a terribly conceited man,” she replied somewhat evasively and with a forced laugh.

“I am afraid I am a little conceited,” he responded with a smile. Then he asked earnestly, after a slight pause, “Won’t you tell me what caused you to have the blues while I was away?”

She did not answer, but looked away from him. He, being utterly unable to control his feelings, drew her to him and pressed her closely to his breast. She was greatly agitated.

"Reginald, if we are to be friends, you must not," she said hurriedly, quickly drawing herself away.

"Forgive me, Helene," he pleaded, folding his arms across his broad chest.

After she had recovered her composure she said, looking up at him with a sweet, quiet smile: "All day I have felt so very tired, so I shall retire. You will then have an opportunity to go to the hotel and enjoy a chat with Mr. Grey."

"But I intend to remain instead and chat with you."

"Do you?" she asked, moving in the direction of the door. "Suppose we defer it to some other time."

"I would rather not," he objected earnestly.

"I really do feel very tired," she said quietly.

"Then if you must go," he answered sadly "I permit you to leave me, with reluctance."

"Good-night, Reginald."

"Good-night, Helene," he answered, as he watched her glide softly from the room.

When he was alone Reginald Clairmont threw himself into one of the chairs near the table where he had discovered Grace, Helene, and Myriam sitting when he had entered the room, and buried his face in his hands. He did not want Helene's friendship—he wanted her love. He knew that she did not care for him except as a friend. Helene, however,

knew differently. When she had repaired to her own room she did not immediately make preparations for retiring but stood at the window for a long time, gazing and smiling up at the Pleiades shining in the far distant heavens.

That night Helene did not rest well, for the god Somnus did not permit her to enter the Land of Slumber, but Morpheus allowed her to wander on the Shore of Dreamland. Not feeling well, she rose early the next morning and wearing a dainty gown of soft, white muslin, with blue ribbons encircling her neck and waist, descended the broad marble staircase, passed through the hall and thence to the portico. She walked to that end where the morning-glories grew and stood leaning against the settle.

It was one of those mornings, or rather one of those days, in early June which Lowell describes so beautifully in his "Sir Launfal." The air was cool, fresh, and sweet with the most delicate perfume from the flowers; the sky was of a deep blue with ripples of white and rosy clouds floating here and there, and not a shadow of a dark one marring its clear beauty; yellow, purple and silver butterflies basked and fluttered in the glorious golden sunshine, and the morning-glories, as they lifted their tiny purple heads, bejewelled with the silver dewdrops, smiled and coquetted with the sunbeams as the gentle breeze swung them to and fro.

Helene was drinking in all this rare beauty of Nature, when she was startled by some one near her. She glanced up and encountered Mr. Clairmont's eyes resting upon her.

"Good-morning, Reginald," she said, with a sad, quiet smile.

"Good-morning, Helene," he returned somewhat listlessly.

"Isn't it an ideal day?" she began by way of conversation.

"Yes," he answered sadly. "Everything seems to be so glad and happy."

"Do you know," she said, "to-day reminds me of the one so beautifully described in 'Sir Launfal?'"

"It does me, too. Everything seems glad and happy except me," he objected bitterly.

"Why aren't you?" she asked, turning and looking at him and, for the first time, noticing that there were threads of silver here and there among the silken masses of his dark hair.

"No, Helene," he answered with intense bitterness. "I shall never be happy again so long as I live. Sometimes I almost become desperate and think I shall say farewell to my native land forever and go to the antipodes. You do not know, you can never know, how and what I have suffered. Since my father's death and our—"

Here he ceased speaking and looked away at the blue lake, which seemed so still and peaceful in the early morning sunshine. With

folded arms he leaned with his back against one of the heavy Doric columns. There was a very long silence between them. Then suddenly they looked straight into each other's eyes and each almost read the inmost thoughts of the other.

"Reginald, it is very wrong for you to talk in this way on such a bright and beautiful morning," she remonstrated in a low, sad voice.

For a moment he studied the woman before him, then taking her hands, almost crushed them within his own. "Oh! Helene," he said with hard, tense bitterness, his features becoming rigid as steel, "if you had suffered as I have, if you had distressed, nay, almost murdered your old father as I did, and last of all, if you had caused your wife, the only woman you had ever loved and ever could love, to despise you and seek divorce, you, too, would say that you could never be happy again."

Helene looked up into the noble face and saw there lines, not caused by dissipation, but by deep sadness, intense bitterness, and untold suffering.

"Reginald, will you promise me something?" she asked with a sad, quiet smile.

"Yes—what is it?"

"Will you promise me that you will never again permit yourself to yield to and to be controlled by the melancholy moods?"

"Helene, I can no more dispel these feelings than I can shatter the stars."

"Won't you try to be happy if I ask it?" she entreated with tears in her voice.

He did not answer, but slowly drew her to him and pressed her closely against his breast.

"Helene, will you come back to me? Will you come back to brighten a sorrowful man's desolate heart and home? For four long, weary years I have waited this hour when I thought I could ask you to return to me. Helene, I cannot give you up to another man, not even an abstraction. Oh, God! I cannot give her up," he said desperately; "it would drive me mad."

"Reginald, you must—must not talk like this," she pleaded in an agonized voice.

"Helene, I love you with the very desperation of a man's soul. Forgive and forget, and let me be to you what I ought to have been four years ago. I will give up wealth and art if you will only come back to me."

She circled her arm up about his neck and looked up into his face with eyes bedewed with tears.

"Reginald, won't you try now to be happy for my sake?" she implored, with a tremor in her low, rich voice.

He inclined his head so much that she felt his warm breath against her face. Then he answered hoarsely: "God knows I shall be happy now, for the only woman I have ever

loved, and love now with the very intensity of my soul, is coming back to me."

Helene laid her cheek against his shoulder. He, then drawing her more closely to him and bending his head still lower, gazed searchingly and yearningly into the great, unfathomable violet eyes and then, without one word, pressed his lips reverently but fervently to hers. Ah, what a love was theirs, so pure, so intense, so sacred!

After a long, long silence, gently but firmly holding her hands in his, he held her off at arm's length from him and gazed with a burning gaze into the shadowy, violet eyes that were so ineffably dear to him and now all his own.

"Helene, where did you get those carnations?" he queried, with a faint smile.

"Some one sent them to me."

"Who, may I ask?"

"Really, Reginald, I do not know. Some one has, every day for the last four years, since my divorce, kindly remembered me with a box of the choicest flowers. Do you know, I have made every effort to discover the name of my kind unknown friend, but have never succeeded."

"Was there never a note nor card with them?"

"No, there was never anything until yesterday."

"If I am not too presuming, will you tell me what it was?"

She flushed deeply and looked down at the spicy flowers at her breast. She hesitated a moment and then said in a low, clear voice: "Yesterday, as I opened the box, I found, nestling among the lovely blooms, a card upon which was written, in a perfectly unfamiliar hand, 'To the only woman I have ever loved.' I have wished again and again to know the name of this kind donor, so that I might thank him, but all my efforts at discovery have proved fruitless."

"Helene, I sent them," he said, with deep tenderness, once more drawing her toward him and pressing her closely to his breast and laying his cheek against her blue-black hair.

"You?" she asked with astonishment. "You sent them? Why did you do it?"

"Because I loved you," he answered. "Do you know," he asked with a smile, slightly tinged with sadness, "what this means to me?"

"No; what, dear?" she entreated with a great thrill in her soulful voice.

"It means that a new but bright and beautiful morn has dawned in my life and our love is the morning-glory, glorious, wonderful, divine."

"Yes, among the morning-glories," and she laughed softly. He kissed her passionately.

"Reginald, I love you," she said almost under her breath.

He did not speak, but gazed with deep, yearning, and ineffable tenderness into those shadowy violet depths he loved so utterly. There were a few moments of sweet silence between them. When Reginald Clairmont spoke, it was in proud, happy tones:

"Helene, when we are married we will labor together to present clean and beautiful plays, plays that will refresh, entertain, and instruct, as well as brighten, elevate and ennoble the soul. We will labor together to elevate the stage to the highest standard of dramatic art and to liberate Dramana, who has been insulted, trampled in the very dirt, and hurled into prison, where the walls are unclean, the jailers rough and harsh, the language and costumes foul and indecent and all is wicked. We will endeavor to free Dramana, the great queen of all the arts, who has been imprisoned by so many actors and managers who desire money or fame in preference to true art, and who do not love and revere art purely for art's sake."

"Yes," returned Helene, proudly but firmly, "we will labor together to hurl open wide the doors of Dramana's cell and set her free—Dramana, the fair and beautiful queen of the four grand divine arts."

